DANIEL | MATTHEW 24 | REVELATION 1–22

FROM THE SEVEN-SEALED SCROLL TO THE NEW JERUSALEM

The Final Transition from the Old Creation to the New

A Prophetic Correlation of
Daniel, Matthew 24, and Revelation 1–22

"And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it."

Revelation 5:3

The Seven-Sealed Scroll (Rev. 5–8)

Seals • Trumpets • Bowls • The Kingdom

Kevin Elias Hartwell

From the Seven-Sealed Scroll to the New Jerusalem

The Final Transition from the Old Creation to the New

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G. The opening of the first seal in Revelation 6 should therefore be understood within this forward-moving eschatological context rather than automatically projected backward across the entire church age.

V. The First Six Seals Correspond to the Opening Half of Daniel's Seventieth Week

A. The first seal presents a rider upon a white horse who goes forth "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1-2).

B. Rather than necessarily representing the preaching of the gospel throughout the church age, this rider may correspond more naturally to the Lord's first warning concerning deception and false Christs in Matthew 24:4-5.

C. The similarity between the white horse of Revelation 6 and Christ's white horse in Revelation 19 does not establish that the two riders are identical; Revelation 19 explicitly identifies its Rider as Faithful and True and the Word of God.

D. The second seal brings warfare and the removal of peace from the earth (Rev. 6:3-4), corresponding closely to the wars described in Matthew 24:6-7.

E. The third seal introduces famine and severe economic scarcity (Rev. 6:5-6), again corresponding to the Lord's description of famine among the beginning birth pangs.

F. The fourth seal produces widespread death through sword, hunger, death or pestilence, and wild beasts (Rev. 6:7-8).

G. The fifth seal reveals martyrs crying for divine vindication (Rev. 6:9-11), corresponding broadly to the persecution and martyrdom described by the Lord in Matthew 24:9.

H. The sixth seal brings tremendous terrestrial and cosmic disturbance (Rev. 6:12-17), indicating that the prophetic crisis is moving toward a decisive transition.

I. Although Revelation does not explicitly state that the first six seals equal exactly three and one-half years, their correlation with Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 makes their placement principally within the first half of the seventieth week a coherent prophetic synthesis.

VI. The Seventh Seal Opens the Massive Final Phase of the Prophetic Program

A. Revelation 7 forms an important explanatory interlude between the sixth and seventh seals.

B. When the seventh seal is opened in Revelation 8:1, it differs dramatically from the preceding six seals.

C. The seventh seal does not merely introduce one additional judgment; its opening immediately leads to the seven angels receiving seven trumpets (Rev. 8:1-2).

D. The seventh seal may therefore be understood as a massive container whose contents unfold progressively through the remainder of the prophetic program.

E. The Russian-doll analogy illustrates this telescoping structure: the seventh seal contains the trumpet sequence, while the later judgments unfold from within this increasingly concentrated divine administration.

F. Within the Daniel-Matthew-Revelation synthesis, the seventh seal can be associated especially with the latter three and one-half years and the Great Tribulation proper.

G. Revelation repeatedly identifies this crucial period as forty-two months, 1,260 days, and "a time and times and half a time" (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

H. The character of the judgments also intensifies dramatically as the prophecy progresses from the seals into the trumpets and ultimately the bowls.

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A. The seventh seal begins with the latter phase of the final seven years, but its consequences need not be restricted chronologically to the Tribulation itself.

B. The trumpet judgments progress toward the seventh trumpet and the announcement that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15).

C. The explanatory visions of Revelation 12-14 disclose crucial spiritual realities involving Satan, the beast, the persecution of God's people, overcoming, firstfruits, and harvest.

D. Revelation 15-16 introduces the seven bowls, which bring God's wrath toward its consummation.

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F. Revelation 17-18 then provides an enlarged explanation of Babylon the Great and her final destruction.

G. Revelation 19 unveils Christ's victorious appearing, followed by the destruction of the beast and false prophet.

H. Revelation 20:1-3 records Satan's imprisonment in the abyss for one thousand years.

I. Revelation 20:4-6 describes the millennial reign of Christ and His overcoming saints.

J. Revelation 20:7-10 moves beyond the Millennium to Satan's release, his final rebellion, and his eternal judgment in the lake of fire.

K. Revelation 20:11-15 presents the great white throne, the final judgment of the dead, and the casting of death and Hades into the lake of fire.

L. The enormous seventh-seal complex can therefore be understood as ultimately carrying God's governmental dealings through the complete termination of the old order in Revelation 20.

VIII. Revelation 21-22: Everything Becomes New

A. Revelation 21:1 provides the great boundary between the completed judgments of the old creation and the eternal new creation: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

B. By this point Babylon is gone, the beast and false prophet are gone, Satan is gone, death and Hades are gone, and the first heaven and first earth have passed away.

C. New Jerusalem descends out of heaven from God as the consummate corporate expression of God's eternal purpose (Rev. 21:2).

D. The final vision is therefore not destruction but consummation: God dwelling with redeemed humanity in an entirely new order.

E. The river of water of life and the tree of life in Revelation 22 reveal that God's eternal purpose consummates in life rather than merely in governmental judgment.

F. Significantly, near the conclusion Jesus again refers to "the churches": "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches" (Rev. 22:16).

G. Thus the churches addressed as golden lampstands at the beginning of Revelation remain the intended recipients of the tremendous unveiling that ultimately terminates in New Jerusalem.

IX. Conclusion: The Lamb Brings the Old Creation to Its End and Introduces the New

A. Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation together present a coherent prophetic progression from the final crisis of human government to the establishment and ultimate consummation of God's eternal purpose.

B. Daniel supplies the seven-year framework and its midpoint; Matthew distinguishes the beginning birth pangs from the Great Tribulation; Revelation provides the detailed unveiling through the opening of the seven-sealed scroll.

C. The first six seals can reasonably be associated principally with the first half of Daniel's seventieth week, while the seventh seal introduces the enormous latter-half complex beginning with the Great Tribulation.

D. The seventh seal is therefore profoundly disproportionate to the first six because it functions as the great telescoping seal through which the final divine judgments and subsequent governmental dealings unfold.

E. Its consequences extend through the trumpets, bowls, Babylon's destruction, Christ's appearing, the Millennium, Satan's final destruction, and the great white throne, reaching the termination of the old creation in Revelation 20.

F. Revelation 21-22 then stands beyond this enormous transition as the unveiling of what is genuinely new: the new heaven, the new earth, and New Jerusalem.

G. The central figure throughout this entire transition is the Lamb. The One who walks among the golden lampstands is the One worthy to open the scroll, execute God's governmental purpose, overthrow every opposing power, and bring God's eternal purpose to its consummation.

Central Thesis

The prophetic visions of Daniel, the Lord's discourse in Matthew 24, and the opening of the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation together portray the final divinely governed transition from the old age and ultimately the old creation into the kingdom of Christ, the termination of every opposing power, and finally the new heaven, the new earth, and New Jerusalem. Daniel establishes the prophetic framework, Matthew 24 identifies the progression from the beginning birth pangs into the Great Tribulation, and Revelation unveils in extraordinary detail the divine administration through which the old order is brought to its appointed end. At the center of this entire transition stands the Lamb, who alone is worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll and carry God's governmental purpose forward to its eternal consummation.

I. Introduction: Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation Describe One Great Prophetic Transition

The Final Prophetic Transition

The final prophetic events revealed in Scripture should not be viewed merely as a succession of catastrophes culminating in the destruction of the present world. They constitute a vast governmental transition through which God brings the present age to its conclusion, terminates everything belonging to the old rebellious order, establishes the kingdom of Christ, and

ultimately introduces the new heaven, the new earth, and New Jerusalem**.** The wars, famines, persecutions, cosmic disturbances, and judgments described in the prophetic Scriptures are therefore not the ultimate subject of prophecy. They are stages within a much greater divine movement. Behind the outward upheaval is the throne of God and the administration of the Lamb, directing history toward the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

Three portions of Scripture are particularly important for understanding this final transition: Daniel, Matthew 24, and Revelation. Daniel provides the fundamental prophetic framework. In Daniel 2 and 7, human government reaches its termination and is replaced by the kingdom established by God. Daniel 9 then supplies the chronological framework of the seventy prophetic weeks, culminating in a final seventieth week divided at its midpoint. Matthew 24 records the Lord Jesus' own description of the consummation of the age, beginning with deception and false Christs and proceeding through wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and ultimately the Great Tribulation. Revelation then unveils from a heavenly perspective the detailed governmental process through which the Lamb brings this entire prophetic program to its consummation.

These three prophetic witnesses should therefore be considered together rather than treated as unrelated accounts. Daniel establishes the framework; Matthew provides the Lord's own description of the progression of events; Revelation enlarges the picture by showing how these events proceed from God's throne through the opening of the seven-sealed scroll. This correspondence becomes particularly significant when Matthew 24 is compared with Revelation 6. The Lord first warns concerning false Christs, followed by wars, famines, pestilences, and persecution. Revelation 6 similarly begins with a conquering rider and proceeds through warfare, famine, widespread death, and martyrdom. Such correspondence provides substantial reason for considering the first seals as belonging to the same final prophetic period described by the Lord rather than automatically extending them throughout the entire church age.

Daniel's seventieth week provides the chronological framework within which this correlation can be understood. Daniel states that the final week is divided "in the middle of the week" (Dan. 9:27). Matthew likewise presents a decisive turning point when the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel appears in the holy place (Matt. 24:15). Only after introducing this event does the Lord say, "For then there will be great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21). This distinction is extremely important. The deception, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and persecution preceding the abomination are identified by the Lord as "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8), whereas the unparalleled Great Tribulation follows the decisive development associated with Daniel's prophecy.

This distinction provides a coherent basis for understanding the structure of the seven seals. The first six seals may reasonably be associated principally with the opening half of Daniel's seventieth week, corresponding broadly to the beginning of sorrows described in Matthew 24. The seventh seal, however, is dramatically different from the preceding six. When it is opened, it does not simply produce another judgment comparable to the previous seals. Instead, seven angels are given seven trumpets (Rev. 8:1-2). The seventh seal therefore opens into a much larger prophetic complex. It functions like a great container whose contents progressively unfold

through the trumpet judgments and the increasingly concentrated divine administration that follows.

The prophetic significance of this seventh seal extends far beyond the observation that it contains the seven trumpets. Within the larger structure of Revelation, its opening initiates a governmental progression that eventually reaches the destruction of Babylon, the appearing of Christ, the defeat of the beast and false prophet, the imprisonment of Satan, the millennial kingdom, Satan's final rebellion and judgment, and the great white throne. Only after these matters have been completed does John see the first heaven and first earth pass away and a new heaven and new earth appear (Rev. 21:1). The opening of the sealed scroll therefore belongs to a divine administration whose ultimate result is nothing less than the complete termination of the old creation and the introduction of the new.

The Seven Churches as Golden Lampstands

This enormous transition must also be understood in relation to the churches. Revelation begins not with the Tribulation but with Christ walking in the midst of seven golden lampstands, explicitly identified as the seven churches (Rev. 1:12-13, 20). Before proceeding further, however, it is essential to understand what these churches actually were. The seven churches addressed by the Lord Jesus were not "local churches" according to the prevailing modern usage of that expression. They were genuine apostolic local churches, each identified simply with the city in which it existed: the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, the church in Thyatira, the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia, and the church in Laodicea (Rev. 1:11). Their identity was geographical rather than denominational, doctrinal, ministerial, cultural, ethnic, or organizational.

This distinction is especially necessary for the modern reader because the word church has acquired a meaning in contemporary Christianity that would have been foreign to the apostolic churches. Today virtually any religious modifier may be placed before the word church and the resulting organization is commonly accepted as a legitimate local church. Thus one encounters Baptist churches, Methodist churches, Lutheran churches, Presbyterian churches, Pentecostal churches, independent churches, community churches, and countless other forms of ecclesiastical identification. The word church may even be removed altogether and replaced by such designations as chapel, fellowship, Christian life center, assembly, community, or some newly created organizational name. Because this arrangement has existed for centuries, it appears entirely normal to the contemporary Christian mind.

The New Testament presents something fundamentally different. The believers in a city were not divided into separately named religious bodies distinguished from one another by doctrine, practice, historical tradition, preferred ministry, or denominational affiliation. Paul could therefore write "to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), even though that church contained serious internal problems. Likewise, Revelation does not speak of several churches in Ephesus distinguished by competing theological traditions, nor of several churches in Smyrna organized around different ministries. The Lord addresses "the church in Ephesus," "the church in Smyrna," and correspondingly one church in each of the other named cities (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12,

18; 3:1, 7, 14). The locality identified the church because the believers within that locality belonged to the one Body of Christ.

This makes the apostolic pattern fundamentally different from the normalized divisions of Christianity today. A division in the Body of Christ does not become scripturally legitimate merely because the word church is attached to it, nor does changing the designation to chapel, fellowship, or some other religious name alter its underlying character. The fundamental question is not what a Christian organization calls itself but what ground it takes for its existence. If believers separate themselves from other believers in the same locality according to a particular doctrine, historical tradition, ministerial allegiance, practice, ethnicity, or organizational affiliation, the resulting boundary is narrower than the Body of Christ itself. The apostolic churches were not constituted upon such boundaries.

This principle is already unmistakably established in 1 Corinthians. When some believers began saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," and "I am of Christ," Paul did not regard these distinctions as acceptable varieties of Christian expression. He immediately asked, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:12-13). Significantly, these believers had not yet formed separate institutions with separate buildings, clergy, statements of faith, and denominational names. The division was still developing within the one church in Corinth, yet Paul treated even the partisan declarations themselves as contrary to the nature of Christ and His Body. The apostolic answer to Christian division was therefore not to institutionalize the parties and subsequently recognize each party as another legitimate "church." It was to bring the believers back to Christ as their unique center and to the practical oneness that corresponded to the one Body.

Dear reader, there is consequently a great difference between the churches revealed in the New Testament and the normalized ecclesiastical divisions familiar to us today. The two should not be casually equated. When Revelation speaks of "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4), it does not describe seven denominations or seven competing Christian organizations within the same locality. It describes seven churches because seven cities are in view. There is Ephesus, and there is the church in Ephesus. There is Smyrna, and there is the church in Smyrna. The same principle continues through Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The sevenfold distinction corresponds to seven localities, not to seven differing systems of Christian belief or practice.

This point becomes even more striking when we remember when Revelation was written. By the time John received this vision, the churches had already passed through several decades of actual history. Weaknesses had developed. Ephesus had left its first love. Pergamos tolerated serious corruption. Thyatira contained even deeper problems. Sardis possessed a name that it was living while being spiritually dead. Laodicea had become lukewarm and self-satisfied. Yet despite these serious conditions, the Lord Jesus did not redefine the churches according to their weaknesses, nor did He instruct faithful believers to establish rival churches within those cities under new religious names. He still recognized the churches according to their respective localities and appeared in their midst as the Son of Man walking among the golden lampstands.

This is extraordinarily significant. After several decades of church practice, and despite the serious degradation found in some of these localities, Jesus Himself still presents the seven representative churches in the Roman province of Asia as seven golden lampstands. Their gold signifies the precious nature of what belongs to God, while their function as lampstands concerns the bearing of His testimony. Their failures required repentance, correction, discipline, and overcoming, but their weaknesses did not justify the creation of competing ecclesiastical identities within the same cities. The Lord addressed the church in each locality and then called individual believers within those churches to overcome: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7).

The Lord's Call to Overcome

Another feature of the Lord's speaking to the seven churches deserves careful attention. Although the spiritual condition of these churches differed considerably, there is nothing in Revelation 2-3 suggesting that believers in a weaker church should abandon that church and relocate to a city possessing a stronger one. Pergamos contained serious corruption, whereas Philadelphia received extraordinary commendation from the Lord. Yet the Lord never tells the faithful believers in Pergamos to leave their locality and settle in Philadelphia because Philadelphia is the "better church." Such an instruction is completely absent from the text. Instead, Christ addresses the condition of the church in Pergamos where it exists, calls for repentance where repentance is necessary, and promises a reward to the one who overcomes (Rev. 2:12-17).

This becomes even more striking in Thyatira. The Lord exposes an extremely serious condition involving the woman Jezebel, false teaching, immorality, and idolatrous corruption (Rev. 2:18-23). Nevertheless, there were believers in Thyatira who had not accepted this teaching. What does the Lord tell them to do? He does not instruct them to abandon Thyatira and search throughout Asia for a church possessing a more favorable spiritual condition. He addresses "the rest in Thyatira" and tells them, "Hold fast what you have till I come" (Rev. 2:24-25). The faithful were therefore distinguished spiritually from the corruption surrounding them while still being addressed in relation to the church in their own locality.

This is important because the normalized practice of Christianity today operates according to a very different principle. A Christian becomes dissatisfied with one congregation and begins searching for another. One group may be considered too formal, another too liberal, another too charismatic, another insufficiently spiritual, another deficient in teaching, and another simply incompatible with personal preference. Believers consequently move from one separately constituted Christian body to another, sometimes repeatedly, until they find what they regard as a "better church." Within the contemporary denominational and independent system, such movement seems perfectly normal because the existence of numerous competing churches in the same locality has itself become normal.

Revelation 2-3 presents no such ecclesiastical landscape. The Lord does not offer the seven churches as seven alternative congregations from which Christians may select according to spiritual preference**.** Philadelphia is not presented as a superior ecclesiastical option available to dissatisfied believers from Sardis, Pergamos, or Thyatira**.** Each church stands in its own locality

under the direct evaluation of Christ. The church in Pergamos must hear what the Spirit says. The church in Thyatira must hear what the Spirit says. The church in Sardis must hear what the Spirit says. Likewise, the individual believer in each locality bears responsibility before the Lord to hear, repent where necessary, remain faithful, and overcome.

The Lord's repeated word to "him who overcomes" is especially important in this respect. Overcoming does not mean escaping from a difficult local situation by transferring one's allegiance to a more attractive Christian organization. In Revelation 2-3 the overcomer is produced precisely against the background of the actual condition of the church being addressed. Where first love has been lost, the believer must overcome. Where false teaching has entered, the believer must overcome. Where spiritual death prevails, the believer must overcome. Where lukewarmness has developed, the believer must overcome. Christ's answer to degradation is therefore not the multiplication of rival churches but repentance, faithfulness, and overcoming.

This further demonstrates how different the seven churches of Revelation were from the normalized divisions of Christianity today. Their varying spiritual conditions did not destroy the principle of one church in one locality. Nor did the weakness of one church establish a scriptural basis for forming another church in the same city composed of believers who considered themselves more faithful. Even under conditions requiring severe rebuke, the Lord continued to address the church according to its locality while calling the faithful within it to overcome. The golden lampstand might desperately need recovery, but the Lord's remedy was never the establishment of a second lampstand in the same city.

Nowhere in Revelation 1–3, nor in the Lord's concluding testimony in Revelation 22:16, do we receive the slightest impression that the proper response to a degraded church is to establish another church in the same locality or to abandon one's locality and join a different church elsewhere. We are never told that the faithful in Sardis should establish a second church in Sardis because the existing church was dead. We are never told that believers in Thyatira should establish another church because of the corruption tolerated there. Nor are believers in Sardis told to leave Sardis and travel to Philadelphia because Philadelphia had received the Lord's commendation. Such a concept is completely foreign to the textual presentation. The Lord addresses the church where it exists, speaks to its actual spiritual condition, calls for repentance where repentance is necessary, commands the faithful to hold fast, and repeatedly calls individual believers to overcome. The answer to ecclesiastical degradation in Revelation is not the multiplication of churches but the recovery of the believers within the existing church through repentance, faithfulness, and overcoming.

This point should cause the modern reader to reconsider assumptions that have become almost automatic. We should not read our contemporary practice back into Revelation and imagine that the believers of Asia moved among numerous competing congregations according to preference, dissatisfaction, doctrinal emphasis, or perceived spiritual quality. Nothing in the Lord's seven epistles presents such a picture. The seven churches were seven because there were seven localities. Their conditions differed greatly, but Christ remained Lord over each lampstand and dealt directly with His people where they were. The responsibility of the believer was not to

search for the most appealing ecclesiastical alternative but to hear what the Spirit was saying to the churches and, in whatever condition confronted him, to overcome.

This clarification is indispensable for understanding the opening chapters of Revelation. The reader must not unconsciously substitute the fragmented ecclesiastical landscape of modern Christianity for the seven golden lampstands actually seen by John. These were genuine local churches standing upon the apostolic ground of the one Body expressed in their respective localities. They could be weak, degraded, rebuked, or in need of repentance, but they remained identifiable as the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, and so forth. There is no corresponding picture in Revelation 1-3 of several separately named and independently constituted Christian bodies occupying the same city while each is treated by the Lord as a separate local church.

From the Churches to the Throne and the Sealed Scroll

Only after the Lord has completed His direct speaking to these seven churches does the scene dramatically change. Revelation 4:1 begins, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven." John is called upward and brought before God's throne, where he receives a heavenly perspective of the divine administration. Revelation 5 then unveils the seven-sealed scroll in the hand of the One sitting upon the throne and the Lamb who alone is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. The movement is therefore highly significant: first the genuine local churches as golden lampstands under Christ's direct examination; then the opened heaven and the throne; then the Lamb and the sealed scroll; and finally the unfolding of God's governmental dealings with the earth.

This movement from the golden lampstands to the heavenly throne and then to the seven-sealed scroll establishes the perspective from which the remainder of the prophecy should be viewed. The Lamb who walks among the churches is the same Lamb who takes the scroll from the hand of the One sitting upon the throne. He alone is worthy to open it because He has overcome and accomplished redemption (Rev. 5:5-10). The judgments that follow are therefore not uncontrolled disasters. They constitute the administration of the victorious Lamb, who progressively removes everything opposed to God's purpose and brings the entire old order toward its divinely appointed conclusion.

The prophetic revelation that follows must therefore never be severed from the churches to whom it was given. Revelation begins with Christ walking among the golden lampstands, and near the conclusion Jesus again declares, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches" (Rev. 22:16). The churches stand at both ends of the tremendous prophetic unveiling. For this reason, understanding what the New Testament means by the churches is not a secondary ecclesiological question inserted into a study of prophecy. It belongs to the framework of Revelation itself. The Lord who unveils the termination of the old creation and the coming New Jerusalem first directs our attention to His golden lampstands, the genuine local expressions of His one Body upon the earth.

Yet destruction is never the ultimate goal. Revelation does not conclude with the fall of Babylon, the defeat of the beast and false prophet, the imprisonment of Satan, or even the great white

throne. Beyond all these judgments John sees something entirely new: "a new heaven and a new earth" and "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:1-2). The final vision is therefore a vision of consummation rather than catastrophe. The river of water of life proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb, the tree of life grows on both sides of the river, God's servants serve Him and see His face, and God and redeemed humanity dwell together eternally (Rev. 22:1-5).

The prophetic visions of Daniel, the Lord's discourse in Matthew 24, and the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation may therefore be understood as complementary portions of one tremendous unveiling. Daniel establishes the final seven-year framework and its crucial midpoint. Matthew distinguishes the beginning birth pangs from the Great Tribulation that follows the abomination of desolation. Revelation unveils from the heavenly throne how the Lamb executes God's final governmental dealings through the sealed scroll. Together they portray the final divinely governed transition from the old age and ultimately the old creation into the kingdom of Christ, the new heaven and new earth, and the New Jerusalem. The true subject of this prophecy is consequently not merely the Tribulation; it is the Lamb bringing everything old to its appointed termination so that God may declare at last, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

II. Daniel Establishes the Framework of the Final Seven Years

The Termination of Human Government and the Coming Kingdom

The prophetic framework of the final seven years cannot be understood adequately without first considering Daniel's larger revelation concerning the course and termination of human government. Daniel does not begin with the seventieth week. Long before the detailed prophecy of Daniel 9 is given, the book establishes a sweeping view of the successive kingdoms of the earth and their eventual replacement by the kingdom established by God. The final seven years therefore belong within a much larger prophetic movement. They constitute the concluding phase of an age-long history of human government that ultimately reaches its termination under the direct intervention of God.

Daniel 2 presents this history through Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great human image. The image is magnificent and terrifying, composed of a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay (Dan. 2:31-33). Daniel interprets these successive portions as kingdoms beginning with Babylon and continuing through succeeding forms of Gentile government. Although the materials change as the image descends from its head toward its feet, the entire structure remains one great human image. From God's prophetic perspective, the successive kingdoms constitute a continuous development of human government reaching from Babylon to its final manifestation at the end of the age.

The decisive event in the vision is therefore not merely the succession of kingdoms but the sudden intervention of a stone "cut out without hands" (Dan. 2:34). The stone strikes the image upon its feet, and the entire image collapses. The iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold are crushed together and become like chaff carried away by the wind. Nothing belonging to the great image remains. The stone that struck the image then becomes "a great mountain and filled the whole

earth" (Dan. 2:35). Daniel subsequently interprets this event: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44).

This is one of the foundational prophetic declarations concerning the termination of the present governmental order. Human government does not gradually evolve into the kingdom of God. The stone does not improve the image, reform its political structures, or become another component within it. It strikes the image and brings the entire structure to an end. God's kingdom then replaces what has been removed. Daniel's prophecy therefore moves toward a decisive transition from the accumulated history of human rule to the kingdom established by God.

Daniel 7 presents essentially the same transition through different imagery. Instead of a magnificent human image viewed from the standpoint of earthly grandeur, Daniel sees four great beasts arising from the sea (Dan. 7:2-7). The kingdoms that appeared impressive in Nebuchadnezzar's dream now appear beastly from the heavenly perspective. Human government, separated from God's direct rule, ultimately manifests characteristics contrary to the divine nature. The fourth beast is especially dreadful and terrible, possessing great iron teeth and ten horns, and from among those horns another horn arises speaking pompous words (Dan. 7:7-8).

Yet once again the prophecy does not terminate with the triumph of beastly government. Daniel sees thrones put in place and the Ancient of Days seated. "The court was seated, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10). The beast is judged, its body destroyed, and its dominion removed. Daniel then sees "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven" who approaches the Ancient of Days and receives "dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Dan. 7:13-14). His dominion is everlasting, and His kingdom shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 therefore establish the great prophetic background against which Daniel 9 must be read. Both visions move from human government to divine government, from the kingdoms of men to the kingdom given to the Son of Man. Daniel 2 emphasizes the crushing of the great human image by the stone and the establishment of God's kingdom throughout the earth. Daniel 7 emphasizes the judgment of the beastly kingdoms and the giving of dominion to the Son of Man. The imagery differs, but the governmental transition is essentially the same.

The Seventy Weeks and the Final Week

Against this larger background, Daniel 9 provides a much more precise chronological prophecy. Daniel has been praying concerning Jerusalem and the desolation of his people when Gabriel comes to give him understanding. The revelation begins with the declaration, "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city" (Dan. 9:24). The prophecy therefore has a definite relationship to Daniel's people and Jerusalem, and its seventy-week structure provides a measured prophetic framework within which God's governmental purpose advances toward its appointed conclusion.

The "weeks" are commonly understood as weeks of years rather than ordinary seven-day weeks. Seventy weeks therefore represent seventy units of seven years, totaling 490 years. This understanding accords with the historical and prophetic scope of the passage, which extends from the command concerning the restoration of Jerusalem through the coming of Messiah and

onward to the final events described in verse 27. The prophecy itself distinguishes seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and then one final week. Thus the seventy weeks are not presented as an indistinguishable block but as a carefully structured prophetic period.

Of particular importance to the present study is the final, or seventieth, week. Daniel 9:27 states, "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week." Since the prophetic week consists of seven years, this final week constitutes the final seven-year period toward which Daniel's prophecy moves. The verse then introduces one of the most important chronological expressions in biblical prophecy: "But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." The final seven years are therefore explicitly divided by an event occurring at their midpoint.

This simple chronological statement is enormously important. If the week consists of seven years, its midpoint occurs after three and one-half years, leaving another three and one-half years to complete the week. Daniel therefore provides a biblical basis for distinguishing two halves within the final seven-year period. This division does not arise from an arbitrary prophetic system imposed upon the text. It arises from Daniel's own expression, "in the middle of the week."
The latter half of this period becomes especially significant because the interruption of sacrifice and offering is connected with the abominating activity described in the remainder of Daniel 9:27. This same prophetic development is later taken up directly by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24. When the Lord speaks concerning the consummation of the age, He specifically directs His hearers back to "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15). Daniel's midpoint therefore becomes indispensable for understanding the structure of the Lord's prophecy.

The Crucial Midpoint of the Final Seven Years

The division of the seventieth week into two equal halves becomes even clearer when Daniel is read together with the corresponding time designations in Revelation. Revelation repeatedly refers to a period of forty-two months, 1,260 days, or "a time and times and half a time" (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). These expressions describe essentially the same three-and-one-half-year duration from different perspectives. They strongly reinforce the importance of the midpoint already established in Daniel.

The prophetic significance of this midpoint is not merely mathematical. It marks a transition in the character and intensity of the final period. Daniel 9 associates the middle of the week with the termination of sacrifice and offering and the emergence of the abomination. Matthew 24 likewise places the abomination of desolation at a decisive turning point. The Lord does not introduce the Great Tribulation at the beginning of His discourse. He first describes deception, wars, international conflict, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and other developments that He calls "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:4-9). Only after directing His hearers to Daniel's abomination of desolation does He declare, "For then there will be great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21).

Daniel's midpoint therefore provides an important key for distinguishing the opening three and one-half years from the latter three and one-half years. The first half moves toward the decisive

crisis; the midpoint marks the abominating intervention; and the latter half becomes the period of unparalleled tribulation described by the Lord and repeatedly measured in Revelation. This does not mean that the opening half is peaceful or insignificant. As Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 indicate, it may already be characterized by deception, war, scarcity, death, persecution, and tremendous upheaval. Nevertheless, Scripture gives particular emphasis to the latter half as the period in which the final satanic and governmental rebellion reaches an extraordinary concentration.

This distinction is essential for the interpretation that will be developed in the following sections. If the entire seventieth week is indiscriminately called "the Great Tribulation," the important midpoint emphasized by Daniel and the Lord can easily be obscured. Matthew 24 appears to make a more precise distinction. There are the opening birth pangs, followed by the abomination of desolation, and "then" there is Great Tribulation. Daniel provides the chronological structure that makes this distinction intelligible.

Daniel Provides the Foundation for Matthew and Revelation

Daniel consequently supplies much more than a collection of isolated predictions. He establishes the governmental direction of the final prophetic program and the chronological framework necessary for understanding its concluding phase. Daniel 2 shows human government brought to its termination by the kingdom established by God. Daniel 7 shows the beastly kingdoms judged and dominion given to the Son of Man. Daniel 9 then focuses the prophetic chronology upon seventy weeks, culminating in a final seven-year period explicitly divided at its midpoint.

This framework becomes the foundation upon which the Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24 and John's visions in Revelation can be correlated. The Lord Himself establishes the connection by explicitly referring to Daniel when He speaks of the abomination of desolation. Revelation then repeatedly employs the three-and-one-half-year measurements corresponding to the divided final week. These connections provide substantial reason for reading Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation together while respecting the particular emphasis of each book.

Daniel therefore stands at the beginning of our attempt to understand the seven-sealed scroll. Before asking where the seals belong, what the first rider represents, or how the seventh seal relates to the trumpets, we must first establish the prophetic framework within which these events occur. That framework consists of a final seven years divided at the midpoint, with the latter half possessing a distinctive and intensified character. Once this Danielic foundation has been established, the Lord's words in Matthew 24 can be examined more closely, and from there the remarkable correspondence between Matthew's "beginning of sorrows" and the opening seals of Revelation can be considered.

The movement is therefore cumulative: Daniel establishes the framework; Matthew identifies the progression and decisive transition; Revelation unveils the detailed heavenly administration. Together they describe the final stage in the termination of human government and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. Daniel's seventieth week is not the ultimate goal of prophecy, but it provides the chronological doorway through which the final prophetic transition enters its climactic stage.

III. Matthew 24 Describes the Beginning of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation

The Lord Begins with Deception and False Christs

Having established Daniel's final seven-year framework and its decisive midpoint, we may now turn to the Lord's own prophetic words in Matthew 24. The importance of this chapter can hardly be overstated. The Lord Jesus Himself describes the conditions associated with the consummation of the age, and in doing so He specifically directs His hearers back to Daniel. Matthew 24 therefore forms a crucial bridge between the prophetic framework of Daniel and the detailed unveiling of Revelation. Before attempting to interpret the riders, seals, trumpets, and other visions of Revelation, we should listen carefully to the sequence given by the Lord Himself.

The setting begins when the disciples call the Lord's attention to the buildings of the temple. He responds with the startling declaration that not one stone will be left upon another (Matt. 24:1-2). Later, while He is sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples come to Him privately and ask, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). The question therefore reaches beyond the immediate destruction of the temple to His coming and the consummation of the age. The Lord's answer develops accordingly, moving toward the final prophetic crisis and His appearing.

It is highly significant that the Lord's first warning is not concerning warfare, famine, earthquake, or political upheaval. His first word is, "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Matt. 24:4). Deception stands at the head of His prophetic sequence. He then explains the nature of this deception: "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). False Christs therefore occupy the first position in the Lord's description of the developing crisis.

This order deserves careful attention when Matthew 24 is later compared with Revelation 6. The first seal also presents a figure who goes forth conquering. Because he rides a white horse, some have identified him with Christ or with the victorious progress of the gospel. Yet Matthew 24 begins not with the worldwide triumph of gospel preaching but with a warning concerning deceptive claimants to messianic authority. The Lord's sequence therefore provides an important interpretive consideration when we eventually ask who or what the first rider represents. The resemblance of the first rider to something good does not itself establish that he is good; deception frequently operates through resemblance.

Wars, Famines, Pestilences, and the Beginning of Sorrows

After warning concerning false Christs, the Lord turns to warfare: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars" (Matt. 24:6). He cautions His hearers not to be troubled, because these things must occur, but He immediately adds, "the end is not yet." This statement is important. The outbreak of warfare belongs to the movement toward the consummation, but war itself does not mean that the end has fully arrived. The prophetic process is underway, yet additional developments must follow.

The Lord then enlarges the scope of the conflict: "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matt. 24:7). The picture is no longer merely that of isolated disturbances. International conflict spreads, and with it come famines, pestilences, and

earthquakes in various places. The sequence moves from deceptive religious or messianic claims into geopolitical upheaval and then into conditions affecting the basic necessities and stability of human existence. War disrupts peace; famine threatens food; pestilence threatens life; earthquakes disturb the very ground beneath human civilization.

Yet after describing these alarming conditions, the Lord gives them a specific designation: "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8). This expression is crucial for understanding the structure of the chapter. The word translated "sorrows" carries the thought of birth pangs. Birth pangs are genuine and painful, but they are also preliminary. They indicate that a process has entered an acute stage while pointing toward something still to come. By calling these events "the beginning of sorrows," the Lord Himself distinguishes them from the climactic distress He will describe later.

This distinction should not be passed over quickly. False Christs, wars, international conflict, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are terrible events, but the Lord does not yet call them "the Great Tribulation." He calls them the beginning of birth pangs. This provides an important reason for distinguishing the opening portion of the final prophetic period from the unparalleled tribulation that follows the abomination of desolation. The opening period is already characterized by severe upheaval, but the prophetic crisis has not yet reached its ultimate concentration.

The imagery of birth pangs also suggests movement and intensification. Birth pangs are not unrelated events randomly occurring without direction. They belong to a process moving toward a culmination. In the same way, the conditions described by the Lord should not be viewed merely as a collection of recurring disasters scattered throughout human history. Within the context of His answer concerning His coming and the consummation of the age, they form a prophetic progression. Deception, warfare, scarcity, pestilence, and terrestrial disturbance indicate that the age is moving toward its final crisis.

Persecution, Martyrdom, and the Approach of the Crisis

The Lord next turns from general conditions among the nations to the persecution of His people. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt. 24:9). The prophetic progression therefore includes not only upheaval among nations but increasing hostility toward the testimony associated with Christ. Betrayal follows, false prophets arise, lawlessness abounds, and the love of many grows cold (Matt. 24:10-12). The crisis affects human government, society, religion, and the spiritual condition of people.

Martyrdom occupies an especially important place in the sequence because Revelation 6 likewise moves from the first four riders to the martyrs beneath the altar at the opening of the fifth seal. Those martyrs have been slain "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9). They cry for divine vindication and are told to rest until the number of their fellow servants and brethren who will also be killed is completed. Matthew and Revelation are not using identical imagery, but the correspondence in progression is difficult to overlook. In Matthew, deception, warfare, famine, pestilence, and persecution develop in sequence; Revelation 6 presents a conquering rider, warfare, famine, widespread death, and then martyrs.

The Lord nevertheless places an important word of endurance within this increasingly dark picture: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). The prophetic revelation is therefore not given merely to satisfy curiosity about future events. It carries a practical demand for faithfulness. As conditions deteriorate and opposition intensifies, God's people are called to endure. Prophecy and overcoming are never completely separated in Scripture. Revelation itself will repeatedly join the unveiling of future events with the need for the saints to overcome, remain faithful, and keep the testimony of Jesus.

The Lord also declares, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Even amid increasing deception, conflict, lawlessness, and persecution, the testimony concerning God's kingdom continues. Human government is approaching its termination, but the gospel of the coming kingdom is proclaimed as a witness among the nations. This statement forms an appropriate transition to the decisive event that follows, because the Lord now turns directly to Daniel and the midpoint crisis.

The Abomination of Desolation Marks the Decisive Turning Point

Matthew 24:15 begins with an unmistakable connection to the prophecy considered in the preceding section of this writing: "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place." The Lord does not merely use language resembling Daniel; He explicitly names Daniel and directs His hearers to understand his prophecy. The parenthetical exhortation, "whoever reads, let him understand," further emphasizes the importance of recognizing what Daniel had revealed.

This reference takes us directly back to the middle of Daniel's seventieth week. Daniel 9:27 describes the interruption of sacrifice and offering "in the middle of the week" and associates this development with abomination and desolation. The Lord now identifies the appearance of this abomination as the signal for immediate action. Those in Judea are to flee to the mountains. A person on the housetop is not to descend to retrieve possessions, and one in the field is not to return for clothing. The urgency of the Lord's instructions indicates that the prophetic situation has changed dramatically.

This is not simply another event added to the earlier list of wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution. It is a decisive boundary. Before Matthew 24:15 the Lord has described the beginning birth pangs and the developing crisis. At verse 15 He deliberately points back to Daniel's midpoint prophecy. From that point forward His language becomes exceptionally urgent, and the reason is stated explicitly in verse 21.

The importance of the word "then" in Matthew 24:21 should therefore not be underestimated: "For then there will be great tribulation." The Lord does not say at verse 5, "Then there will be great tribulation," when the false Christs appear. He does not say it when wars begin, when famine comes, when pestilences spread, or when earthquakes occur. He does not even use this precise expression when describing the persecution and killing of His people in verse 9. Only after identifying the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel does He declare, "For then there will be great tribulation."

"For Then There Will Be Great Tribulation"

The Lord describes this Great Tribulation in extraordinary terms: it will be "such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). This language distinguishes the period from ordinary historical suffering, however terrible such suffering may be. The Lord presents an unparalleled crisis, unique in the history of the world. He adds that unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened (Matt. 24:22).

This statement strongly supports the distinction already suggested by Daniel's divided seventieth week. Daniel establishes a seven-year period divided "in the middle of the week." The Lord describes preliminary conditions that He calls the "beginning of sorrows," then explicitly invokes Daniel's abomination of desolation, and only afterward announces the Great Tribulation. The two prophetic passages therefore fit together naturally. Daniel supplies the chronology; Matthew supplies the Lord's description of the transition occurring at the midpoint.

The distinction is important because the expression "the Tribulation" is often used broadly for the entire final seven years. Such terminology may be convenient as a general designation, but it can obscure the more precise distinction found in the text. The entire seventieth week may certainly contain tribulation in the ordinary sense of trouble, suffering, persecution, and judgment. Matthew 24:9 itself uses the term tribulation before the midpoint. But the specific unparalleled period designated by the Lord as "great tribulation" begins in connection with the abomination of desolation.

We should therefore distinguish between tribulation within the final seven-year period and the Great Tribulation proper. The opening half may contain tremendous suffering. Indeed, if the first seals of Revelation belong principally to this period, it includes deception, warfare, famine, death, martyrdom, and cosmic disturbance. Nevertheless, the Lord's own language indicates an escalation after the Danielic midpoint. What precedes is the beginning of sorrows; what follows the abomination is the unparalleled Great Tribulation.

The latter portion of Matthew 24 further confirms the extraordinary character of this period. False christs and false prophets arise and show great signs and wonders, seeking if possible to deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:23-24). The Lord warns His hearers not to be misled by reports that Christ has appeared secretly in the desert or inner rooms. His coming will not require such reports: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:27). The period therefore moves from concentrated deception and tribulation toward the unmistakable appearing of Christ.

Matthew Provides the Interpretive Bridge to Revelation 6

Matthew 24 consequently provides an essential interpretive bridge between Daniel and Revelation. Daniel gives the final week and its midpoint. Matthew gives the sequence of conditions leading toward that midpoint and identifies what follows it as the Great Tribulation. Revelation then supplies a much more detailed unveiling of the judgments, actors, spiritual conflicts, and governmental dealings associated with the final prophetic period.

The correspondence between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 is particularly noteworthy. Matthew begins with false Christs; Revelation begins with the rider on the white horse. Matthew proceeds to wars; Revelation's second rider removes peace from the earth. Matthew speaks of famines; Revelation's third rider brings severe scarcity. Matthew includes pestilence and death; Revelation's fourth rider is Death, followed by Hades. Matthew describes persecution and martyrdom; Revelation's fifth seal reveals the martyrs beneath the altar. Matthew's prophecy also moves toward extraordinary signs associated with the approach of the Son of Man, while Revelation's sixth seal introduces tremendous terrestrial and cosmic disturbance.

The correspondence is not so mechanical that every phrase in Matthew must be assigned to one seal, nor does either passage explicitly state that the two sequences are identical. Care is therefore necessary. Nevertheless, their similarity in subject and progression is substantial. Since both passages concern the consummation of the age, and since Matthew itself explicitly connects the final crisis with Daniel, it is reasonable to consider Revelation 6 within the same Danielic framework.

Matthew therefore strengthens the proposal that the first six seals should not automatically be projected backward across the entire church age. The Lord's discourse provides another possibility that follows the immediate prophetic context more naturally: the opening seals correspond principally to the beginning birth pangs of the final period and move toward the decisive midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week. The seventh seal then opens the much larger complex associated especially with the latter phase and the Great Tribulation proper.

The progression established thus far is therefore increasingly coherent. Daniel provides the final seven years and divides them at the midpoint. Matthew describes an opening period of birth pangs, identifies Daniel's abomination as the decisive turning point, and declares that "then" there will be Great Tribulation. Revelation will now allow us to examine the same final transition from the heavenly perspective of the throne and the seven-sealed scroll. Before the first seal is opened, however, Revelation carefully establishes who possesses the authority to open the scroll and from where the administration proceeds. The Lamb alone is worthy, and the entire prophetic transition unfolds under His sovereign hand.

IV. Revelation 1–5 Establishes the Setting for the Opening of the Seven-Sealed Scroll

The Golden Lampstands and Christ’s Direct Speaking to the Churches

Revelation does not begin with the opening of the seven-sealed scroll. Before John sees the throne, before the scroll appears, and before any of its seals are opened, the book first presents a remarkable vision of Christ in the midst of seven golden lampstands. John turns to see the voice speaking with him and beholds “seven golden lampstands,” and in their midst “One like the Son of Man” (Rev. 1:12–13). The interpretation is not left to speculation, for the Lord Himself declares, “the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20). Thus the prophetic unveiling of Revelation begins with Christ and the churches before it proceeds to the throne and the divine administration of the final prophetic events.

These seven churches should not be confused with the normalized denominational and independent divisions familiar to modern Christianity. They were churches in seven actual cities

of the Roman province of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. There was one lampstand corresponding to each locality. Their spiritual conditions differed considerably, yet the Lord continued to recognize each church according to its locality and to address it directly. This ecclesiological setting is important because it establishes the earthly testimony of Jesus immediately before Revelation turns our attention toward the heavenly throne.

The fact that the lampstands are golden is also significant. Whatever weaknesses had developed among the churches, Christ did not portray them as common or worthless objects. Gold throughout Scripture is associated with what is of God and corresponds to His divine nature. The churches as golden lampstands were therefore exceedingly precious in His sight and bore a testimony belonging to Him. Nevertheless, a lampstand exists to shine, and consequently the Lord evaluates the actual condition of each church according to its responsibility to bear His testimony.

Revelation 2–3 records this direct and searching speaking of Christ to the churches. He knows their works, their labor, their endurance, their suffering, their faithfulness, their compromises, and their failures. Ephesus had left its first love. Pergamos tolerated corrupting teaching. Thyatira permitted the influence symbolized by Jezebel. Sardis possessed a name that it was living while being spiritually dead. Laodicea had become lukewarm and self-satisfied. Smyrna and Philadelphia, by contrast, receive no comparable rebuke. Yet throughout these differing conditions the Lord repeatedly calls His people to hear: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The repeated call to overcome is equally important. Christ does not merely expose degradation; He seeks overcomers within the actual conditions confronting His people. Each of the seven epistles concludes with a promise to the one who overcomes. The promises differ, but the principle remains constant: Christ desires believers who hear His speaking, respond to His evaluation, remain faithful to Him, and overcome whatever condition opposes His testimony. Revelation therefore establishes the matter of overcoming before unveiling the tremendous conflict and judgments associated with the final prophetic period.

This sequence should not be overlooked. The Revelation of Jesus Christ begins with His people under His direct examination. Before the reader becomes occupied with beasts, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, Armageddon, or the Great Tribulation, Christ directs attention to the condition of His churches. The One who will shortly be revealed as the Lamb possessing authority to open the seven-sealed scroll is first seen walking among the golden lampstands. The prophetic judgments that follow are therefore not disconnected from the opening vision. The same Christ who examines His testimony upon the earth subsequently executes God’s universal administration from the heavenly position.

No Prophetic Authorization for a Later Ecclesiastical Pattern

There is another important implication of the seven golden lampstands that must be emphasized. Nothing in Revelation suggests that the apostolic pattern of the local churches was temporary, provisional, or destined to undergo a legitimate ecclesiastical evolution after the passing of the apostles. There is no prophetic indication that the church in a city would

eventually be replaced by numerous separately named religious organizations occupying the same locality, distinguished from one another by doctrine, tradition, historical origin, organizational affiliation, preferred practice, or the personality and ministry of particular leaders. Such developments can certainly be described historically, but Revelation never presents them as a divinely authorized development of the apostolic pattern.

This is especially significant because Revelation was written decades after the church in Jerusalem first appeared in history in Acts 2. By the time John received the Revelation, the churches had already experienced years of growth, persecution, doctrinal difficulty, spiritual decline, internal problems, and changing historical circumstances. The apostolic churches were no longer in their earliest stage. If the principle of a church corresponding to its locality had merely been an expedient arrangement suitable to the earliest years of the Christian testimony, Revelation would have provided an extraordinary opportunity for the Lord to indicate that a different arrangement had now become legitimate. Yet no such alteration appears.

Instead, Christ still recognizes the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, the church in Thyatira, the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia, and the church of the Laodiceans (Rev. 2–3). One locality corresponds to one church and one lampstand. The passage of several decades had not changed the pattern. Different circumstances had not changed it. Spiritual weakness had not changed it. Doctrinal problems had not changed it. Persecution had not changed it. The churches remained identifiable according to their respective cities.

This makes the argument that later departures from the apostolic pattern should simply be accepted as the normal consequence of historical development exceedingly difficult to reconcile with the New Testament record. Historical circumstances may explain why a development occurred; they do not establish that God authorized it. The passage of time cannot, by itself, transform an unscriptural arrangement into a scriptural one. Neither cultural change, geographical expansion, doctrinal controversy, institutional necessity, nor accumulated tradition possesses authority to revise what the Lord Himself continued to recognize near the close of the apostolic age.

To argue that Christian division was simply a necessary or legitimate “evolution” of the church because circumstances became more complicated is therefore to allow subsequent history to interpret and modify Scripture rather than allowing Scripture to judge subsequent history. The New Testament does not teach that an apostolic pattern remains authoritative only until later Christians find it difficult to maintain. Nor does Revelation announce that the Lord has authorized a transition from churches defined by locality to competing churches defined by distinctive names, doctrines, traditions, ministries, or affiliations. Such an ecclesiastical development unquestionably occurred in history. The question, however, is not whether it occurred, but whether the New Testament authorized it. Revelation supplies no such authorization.

The conditions within the seven churches make this point even more striking. Some of them possessed serious weaknesses. Pergamos tolerated teachings the Lord hated. Thyatira permitted grave corruption. Sardis had a name that it was living while actually being dead, and Laodicea

had become lukewarm. Yet nowhere does the Lord instruct faithful believers in a troubled church to establish a second, supposedly better church in the same locality. He does not tell the faithful in Pergamos to leave the deficient church in Pergamos and organize another church there. Neither does He direct dissatisfied believers to relocate to Philadelphia because Philadelphia appears spiritually superior.

This is particularly important because such movement has become almost routine within the divided situation of modern Christianity. A believer becomes dissatisfied with one congregation and moves to another; another group separates over doctrine, practice, leadership, personality, or preference and establishes a new congregation; eventually several organizations in the same city may all claim independently to be local churches. Revelation 2–3 presents an entirely different principle. The Lord addresses the church in the locality and calls the believers there to repent, hear His speaking, remain faithful, and overcome. His remedy for weakness is not the multiplication of competing churches within the same city.

This does not mean that the Lord approves the evil present within a local church. His words to Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea demonstrate precisely the opposite. He rebukes, warns, disciplines, and even threatens the removal of a lampstand (Rev. 2:5). But that very warning is significant. The Lord possesses the authority to remove the lampstand. Individual believers are not presented as possessing authority to manufacture additional lampstands within the same locality whenever they become dissatisfied with the existing condition. The solution revealed in these chapters is repentance and overcoming under the Lord's direct speaking.

The seven golden lampstands therefore provide unusually strong evidence for the continuing validity of the apostolic local-church pattern at the time Revelation was written. Decades after the establishment of the first church in Jerusalem, Christ Himself still recognizes churches according to locality. Their spiritual conditions could vary greatly, and some could even approach the danger of losing their lampstand, but the underlying principle had not been replaced. Revelation contains no transition from this pattern to the denominational, independent, or organizational plurality that later became normalized throughout Christianity.

"For the Churches": The Lord's Confirmation at the End of Revelation

Nor does the matter of the churches disappear permanently after Revelation 3. Near the conclusion of the entire book, after the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, the kingdom, the final judgment, the new heaven and new earth, and the New Jerusalem have all been unveiled, the Lord Jesus makes a remarkable declaration: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches" (Rev. 22:16).

This statement forms a significant bookend with Revelation 1–3. The Revelation begins with seven actual churches represented as seven golden lampstands, and near its conclusion Jesus declares that the prophetic testimony contained in the book has been given "for the churches." Strictly within the immediate context of Revelation, the natural referent of these churches is the kind of churches introduced at the beginning of the book: the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Nothing within the intervening visions

announces that their scriptural constitution has become obsolete or that another ecclesiastical arrangement has received divine authorization.

The placement of Revelation 22:16 is especially impressive. The prophetic visions have reached their consummation. Babylon the Great has been destroyed. Christ has taken possession of the earth. Satan has been judged. The first heaven and first earth have passed away. The New Jerusalem has descended out of heaven from God. Yet before the book closes, Jesus again directs attention to "the churches." The churches of Revelation 1–3 therefore stand at the opening of the prophetic book, and the Lord's testimony for the churches appears again at its conclusion.

Historical development and divine approval must consequently be distinguished. History tells us what Christians eventually did; Scripture determines whether what they did corresponded to the apostolic revelation. The existence of a practice for centuries cannot establish its scriptural legitimacy. Revelation leaves us with Christ walking among local churches as golden lampstands at its beginning and Christ sending His prophetic testimony "for the churches" at its end. Between those two declarations there is no divine charter for the normalization of division.

This makes the ecclesiological setting of Revelation directly relevant to the prophetic argument of this writing. The book does not begin with an undefined religious entity called Christianity. It begins with actual local churches recognized by Christ as golden lampstands. Only after His direct speaking to these churches has been completed does the prophetic viewpoint undergo its dramatic transition from earth to heaven.

"After These Things": From the Churches to the Heavenly Throne

A decisive transition occurs at Revelation 4:1. John writes, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven." The expression "after these things" appears twice in the verse, giving particular emphasis to the change in the vision. The direct speaking to the seven churches has been completed, and John is now called upward: "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." The viewpoint of the revelation changes dramatically. John is no longer looking at Christ walking among the lampstands on earth; he is brought through an opened door into heaven and shown the throne of God.

The throne dominates Revelation 4. John immediately declares, "behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne" (Rev. 4:2). Everything else in the chapter is described in relation to this throne. Around it are twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders. From it proceed lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Before it burn seven lamps of fire, identified as the seven Spirits of God, and before it is something like a sea of glass. The four living creatures surround the throne and continually proclaim the holiness of the Lord God Almighty (Rev. 4:4–8). The entire scene presents an ordered heavenly administration centered upon God's sovereign authority.

This heavenly perspective is indispensable for understanding everything that follows. The events of Revelation are not ultimately governed by the beast, the false prophet, rebellious nations, demonic powers, or Satan. These actors may appear terrifying when viewed from the earth, but Revelation first takes John into heaven and shows him the throne. Before the dragon appears, the throne is there. Before the beast rises, the throne is there. Before the seals,

trumpets, and bowls bring tremendous upheaval upon the earth, the throne is there. The prophetic events proceed within the sphere of God's sovereign governmental administration.

Revelation 4 also emphasizes God as Creator. The twenty-four elders fall before the One sitting upon the throne and declare, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11). This declaration has particular significance for a prophetic revelation that will ultimately terminate with the passing away of the first heaven and first earth and the appearance of a new heaven and new earth. The One who administers the termination of the old creation is the very One by whose will all things originally came into existence.

The movement from Revelation 1–3 into Revelation 4 is therefore immense. The first three chapters reveal Christ's governmental dealing with His churches as the golden lampstands. Chapter 4 enlarges the field of vision from the churches to the entire universe. John is brought into the heavenly council chamber, as it were, where he sees the throne from which God's universal administration proceeds. Only after this heavenly setting has been firmly established does the seven-sealed scroll appear.

The Seven-Sealed Scroll in the Hand of the One upon the Throne

Revelation 5 begins with John seeing something extraordinary in the right hand of the One sitting upon the throne: "a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Rev. 5:1). The scroll is therefore not an incidental object within the vision. It comes directly from the hand of the One upon the throne and becomes the central object around which the entire chapter develops. Its seven seals indicate that its contents are closed and inaccessible until someone possessing the necessary worthiness and authority opens them.

The detail that the scroll is "written inside and on the back" is particularly noteworthy. The writing is not confined to the concealed interior. John specifically sees that the scroll is written on both sides. The image suggests a document fully occupied with writing and yet secured by seven seals. Whatever divine decrees, judgments, inheritances, or governmental determinations are represented within it, their execution awaits the opening of those seals. Revelation 6 will begin to disclose what happens as the seals are successively opened, but Revelation 5 first raises the more fundamental question: Who is worthy to open the scroll?

A strong angel proclaims with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" (Rev. 5:2). The question is not who possesses sufficient intellectual ability to understand it or physical strength to break its seals. The issue is worthiness. John then reports that "no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it" (Rev. 5:3). The inability is universal. No created being possesses the qualification necessary to take this document from the hand of God and execute what it contains.

John responds by weeping greatly because no one is found worthy to open and read the scroll or to look at it (Rev. 5:4). His reaction indicates the tremendous significance of the unopened scroll. If it remains sealed, the divine purpose represented within it remains unexecuted. The problem of rebellion remains unresolved, the usurping powers remain unjudged, the kingdom is not openly established upon the earth, and the prophetic movement toward the New Jerusalem

cannot reach its consummation. The opening of the scroll is therefore bound up with the accomplishment of God's purpose in history.

The Lamb Alone Is Worthy to Open the Seven Seals

At precisely this point one of the elders tells John, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Rev. 5:5). The qualification of Christ is expressed in one decisive word: He has prevailed**.** He has overcome. The scroll can be opened because there is One in God's universe who possesses the necessary victory and worthiness to take it.

Yet when John looks for the announced Lion, he sees "a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). This is one of the most profound transitions in Revelation. Christ has prevailed as the Lion, yet He appears as the slain Lamb. His victory is inseparable from His redemptive death. He does not seize the scroll through brute force or arbitrary power. He possesses the right to execute God's administration because He has accomplished redemption, defeated the enemy, satisfied God's righteous requirements, and obtained a people for God through His blood.

The heavenly song explains His worthiness: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed them to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The Lamb's worthiness therefore rests upon accomplished redemption and victory. The One who will administer the judgments contained in the prophetic unfolding is the very One who first gave Himself for redemption. Judgment is placed into the hands of the Redeemer.

This relationship is extremely important for understanding the severity of the chapters that follow. The seals are not opened by an impersonal destructive force. They are opened by the Lamb. The trumpets that eventually emerge within the seventh seal do not represent history spinning beyond divine control. The bowls do not indicate that God's purpose has been overwhelmed by chaos. The entire progression originates from the throne and proceeds through the victorious Lamb. Revelation is therefore fundamentally a book of divine administration, not merely a catalogue of disasters.

The movement from chapters 4 and 5 into chapter 6 is consequently deliberate and majestic. First there is the throne. Then there is the scroll in the hand of the One sitting upon the throne. Then the universal question of worthiness is raised. Then the Lamb is revealed as the unique One qualified to take the scroll. Heaven responds with worship. Only after all of this has been established does the Lamb open the first seal.

The Opening of the First Seal Belongs to the Forward Movement of Revelation

This literary and prophetic sequence bears directly upon the interpretation of the first seal. Revelation 6:1 begins, "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals." The statement is simple, but everything in Revelation 1–5 has prepared the reader for it. Christ has spoken to the churches. John has been called upward "after these things." The heavenly throne has been revealed. The seven-sealed scroll has appeared in the hand of God. The Lamb has been declared worthy to take it because He has prevailed**.** Only now does the opening begin.

For this reason, there is substantial contextual difficulty in automatically projecting the first seal backward across the entire church age. Such an interpretation requires the reader to move backward chronologically at precisely the point where the narrative has repeatedly emphasized forward movement. Revelation 4:1 announces "after these things" and promises to show John "things which must take place after this." Revelation 5 then introduces the still-sealed scroll, and Revelation 6 begins its successive opening. The natural movement of the vision is forward.

This observation becomes particularly significant when the first rider is interpreted as the gospel progressing victoriously throughout the church age. Certainly the gospel has gone forth among the nations, and Revelation itself bears abundant testimony to the redemptive accomplishment of Christ. The question, however, is narrower: Does the immediate context of the first seal indicate that John has suddenly returned to the beginning of the church age? Nothing in Revelation 4–6 explicitly announces such a return. The structural movement instead carries the reader from the churches, to the heavenly throne, to the seven-sealed scroll, to the worthy Lamb, and finally to the opening of its first seal.

The connection with Matthew 24 strengthens this forward-looking interpretation. As considered in the preceding section, the Lord begins His description of the consummation of the age with deception and false Christs, followed by wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and martyrdom. Revelation 6 begins with a conquering rider and proceeds through warfare, scarcity, death, and martyrdom. If the first rider is understood as a deceptive messianic or conquering figure rather than as Christ or the gospel, the correspondence with the Lord's own sequence becomes considerably more direct.

Care is still necessary. Revelation does not explicitly state, "The first six seals constitute the first three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week," nor does Matthew explicitly identify its individual events with numbered seals. The correlation therefore remains an interpretation drawn from the convergence of Daniel's chronology, Matthew's progression, and Revelation's structure. Nevertheless, the interpretation deserves serious consideration because it allows these three prophetic witnesses to illuminate one another without requiring the opening seal to be detached from the forward-moving context in which John actually sees it opened.

The sequence developed thus far can therefore be stated with increasing clarity. Daniel establishes the final seven years and their midpoint. Matthew describes the beginning birth pangs, points directly to Daniel's midpoint, and declares that "then" there will be Great Tribulation. Revelation begins with Christ among the apostolic local churches as the golden lampstands, transfers John to the heavenly throne "after these things," reveals the seven-sealed scroll, and identifies the victorious Lamb as the only One worthy to open it**.** Revelation 6 then begins the actual opening of the seals.

We are now prepared to examine those first six seals in detail. The question is no longer merely what each rider or judgment might symbolize in isolation. The more important question is where these seals belong within the prophetic framework already established by Daniel, the Lord Jesus, and the opening five chapters of Revelation. When Revelation 6 is read against that

cumulative background, the remarkable correspondence between the opening seals and the Lord's "beginning of sorrows" becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss.

V. The First Six Seals Correspond to the Opening Half of Daniel's Seventieth Week

The First Seal: Conquest, Deception, and the False Christ

With the prophetic framework now established, we may turn directly to the opening of the seven-sealed scroll. Daniel has supplied the final seven-year period and its decisive midpoint. The Lord in Matthew 24 has described the beginning birth pangs leading toward the abomination of desolation and has declared that "then" there will be Great Tribulation. Revelation 1–5 has brought us from Christ among the seven golden lampstands to the heavenly throne and finally to the Lamb, who alone is worthy to take the scroll and open its seven seals. Revelation 6 now begins the actual execution of what the preceding chapters have prepared us to see.

When the Lamb opens the first seal, John hears one of the four living creatures say, "Come and see." He then beholds "a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1–2). This rider has generated considerable disagreement among interpreters. Because the horse is white and because Revelation 19 later presents Christ riding upon a white horse, the first rider has sometimes been understood positively as Christ or as the victorious progress of the gospel throughout the church age.

There are, however, substantial contextual reasons for questioning that identification. Revelation 6 does not explicitly identify this rider as Christ. By contrast, when Christ appears upon the white horse in Revelation 19, His identity is unmistakable. He is called "Faithful and True"; His eyes are like a flame of fire; upon His head are many crowns; He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and "His name is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:11–13). The Rider of Revelation 19 comes from an opened heaven to judge and make war in righteousness. Nothing comparable is said explicitly concerning the first rider of Revelation 6.

The crowns themselves are also described differently. The first rider is given a crown, whereas the Rider of Revelation 19 possesses many crowns. More importantly, the first rider belongs to a series in which the following riders bring warfare, famine, and death. The four horsemen form an integrated sequence released through the opening of the first four seals. This context makes it reasonable to ask whether the first rider should be interpreted as another element of the developing crisis rather than as the gospel of Christ inserted at the beginning of a sequence of calamities.

Matthew 24 provides an especially significant comparison. When the disciples ask the Lord concerning His coming and the consummation of the age, His first warning is not concerning war or famine. He says, "Take heed that no one deceives you," and then explains, "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:4–5). Only afterward does He speak of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. If Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 describe corresponding aspects of the same final prophetic period, the first rider fits naturally with the Lord's opening warning concerning deceptive messianic conquest.

The white appearance of the horse would then be entirely appropriate to the character of deception. Deception succeeds precisely because it does not initially present itself as obvious evil. A false Christ must possess some resemblance to the true Christ if the deception is to be effective. The similarity between the white horse of Revelation 6 and the white horse of Revelation 19 therefore need not establish identity; it may instead underscore imitation. The first rider may represent a deceptive conquering power whose appearance anticipates the final false claimant who opposes and imitates Christ.

We should nevertheless avoid claiming more than the text itself states. Revelation 6:1–2 does not explicitly call the rider Antichrist, nor does it directly identify him as one of the false christs of Matthew 24. The identification is interpretive. Yet within the cumulative framework developed thus far, a deceptive conquering figure corresponding to Matthew 24:4–5 appears more coherent than projecting the rider backward across the entire church age as the preaching of the gospel.

The Second Seal: Peace Is Taken from the Earth

The opening of the second seal introduces a dramatic escalation. “Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth” (Rev. 6:4). The rider is given a great sword, and the result is that people kill one another. The conquest associated with the first seal is therefore followed by open bloodshed and warfare.

The correspondence with Matthew 24 is striking. Immediately after warning concerning false Christs, the Lord says, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6). He then enlarges the conflict: “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:7). Revelation likewise moves from the first rider to a second rider whose specific function is to remove peace from the earth.

The expression “take peace from the earth” suggests something broader than a single localized war. Human history has certainly been filled with warfare, but the prophetic setting here points toward an intensified condition associated with the consummation of the age. The rider is not merely participating in a war already underway; authority is given to him to remove peace. The result is widespread human slaughter.

This also reinforces the importance of reading the seals as a developing sequence. The second seal does not stand independently of the first. Conquest leads into warfare; warfare will lead into scarcity; scarcity will contribute to widespread death. The opening seals describe a world progressively losing the ordinary restraints and provisions upon which human civilization depends.

The Third Seal: Famine and Severe Economic Scarcity

When the Lamb opens the third seal, John sees “a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand” (Rev. 6:5). A voice then announces, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius” (Rev. 6:6). The imagery clearly points toward severe scarcity and the careful rationing of basic food supplies.

Again the correspondence with Matthew 24 is direct. Following false Christs and warfare, the Lord specifically includes famines among the beginning birth pangs (Matt. 24:7–8). Revelation follows essentially the same progression: conquest, war, and then scarcity. The relationship between war and famine is also readily understandable. Large-scale warfare disrupts agriculture, transportation, labor, commerce, and the distribution of food. What begins as geopolitical conflict rapidly reaches the ordinary person through the price and availability of the necessities of life.

The denarius was commonly associated with approximately a day's wage, making the announced prices extraordinary. A person may labor for an entire day merely to obtain enough wheat for basic subsistence. Barley, a less desirable grain, can be purchased in greater quantity, but even this indicates an economy under severe pressure. The scales in the rider's hand appropriately portray careful measurement in a situation where abundance has disappeared.

Yet the command "do not harm the oil and the wine" indicates that the scarcity is not necessarily absolute at this stage. Certain commodities remain protected or available while staple grains become extraordinarily expensive. The picture is therefore not simply one of universal agricultural annihilation but of severe economic imbalance and scarcity. Human beings are still buying and selling, but the ordinary relationship between labor and food has been catastrophically distorted.

The third seal consequently deepens the pattern already emerging. What the Lord calls the beginning of birth pangs is not a vague collection of troubles. Revelation presents a progressively destabilizing sequence in which conquest gives way to war and war contributes to scarcity. The structures supporting ordinary human existence are beginning to break down.

The Fourth Seal: Death Spreads across the Earth

The fourth seal brings the first four-horse sequence to its terrible culmination. John sees "a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him" (Rev. 6:8). Authority is given "over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth."

The progression is again readily apparent. The sword corresponds naturally to warfare; hunger follows the scarcity already introduced by the black horse; death or pestilence spreads through populations weakened and disrupted by the preceding catastrophes; and even the ordinary relationship between humanity and the animal creation becomes increasingly disordered. The cumulative result is death on an enormous scale.

Matthew 24 again provides the corresponding prophetic background. The Lord speaks of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes as belonging to the beginning of sorrows. Revelation does not reproduce Matthew's wording mechanically, but the conceptual correspondence is substantial. Both passages move through deception, warfare, scarcity, and widespread threats to human life.

The scale of the fourth seal should prevent us from minimizing the severity of the opening half of the seventieth week. To distinguish the beginning birth pangs from the Great Tribulation does

not mean that the first half is mild. These are already catastrophic events. The distinction concerns the scriptural progression and the unparalleled intensity reached after the midpoint, not an absence of severe suffering beforehand.

This is an important qualification. Daniel's division of the seventieth week and the Lord's statement that "then there will be great tribulation" after the abomination of desolation should not lead us to imagine three and one-half tranquil years followed suddenly by three and one-half terrible years. The opening seals suggest precisely the opposite. The first half itself may contain tremendous upheaval, but these conditions are the birth pangs leading toward an even greater crisis.

The Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

With the opening of the fifth seal, the imagery changes. John no longer sees another horse and rider. Instead, he sees beneath the altar "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9). They cry with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

The presence of these martyrs fits naturally with the Lord's words in Matthew 24:9: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." The prophetic crisis is therefore not confined to political, military, economic, and environmental upheaval. It also includes persecution directed against those who maintain the testimony of God.

The martyrs' cry is particularly significant because it shows that the final divine judgment has not yet occurred. They ask how long they must wait before their blood is avenged. White robes are given to them, and they are told to rest "a little while longer," until the number of their fellow servants and brethren who would also be killed is completed (Rev. 6:11). More martyrdom therefore remains ahead.

This statement also contributes to the transitional character of the first six seals. The fifth seal does not portray the conclusion of persecution but a point within an unfolding process. Some have already been slain, yet others will follow. The prophetic crisis is advancing toward its culmination but has not reached it.

The correspondence with Matthew should again be stated carefully. Revelation does not explicitly identify these martyrs as precisely the same individuals described in Matthew 24:9. Nevertheless, both passages place martyrdom within a sequence of end-time upheavals. When considered alongside the preceding correspondences involving deception, warfare, and famine, the parallel becomes increasingly significant.

The Sixth Seal: The Created Order Is Shaken

The sixth seal produces an extraordinary change in scale. John sees a great earthquake; the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair; the moon becomes like blood; the stars of heaven fall to the earth; the sky recedes like a scroll; and every mountain and island is moved out of its place (Rev.

6:12–14). The disturbance is no longer limited to human government, warfare, economics, or persecution. The created order itself appears to convulse.

The human response is universal terror. Kings, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, slaves, and free persons hide themselves in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. Social distinctions suddenly become irrelevant. Those who possessed political authority, military power, wealth, or social standing discover that none of these can protect them from what is occurring.

Their cry reveals how they understand the event: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:16). The throne introduced in Revelation 4 and the Lamb revealed in Revelation 5 now become terrifying realities to the inhabitants of the earth. What John had already seen from heaven is beginning to be recognized from below. The prophetic judgments originate neither in chance nor merely in human conflict. The governmental authority behind the unfolding events belongs to God and to the Lamb.

The concluding question is equally significant: "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). The sixth seal therefore brings the sequence to the threshold of an extraordinary divine intervention. The first four seals have unfolded through conquest, warfare, scarcity, and death. The fifth has revealed the martyrs awaiting vindication. The sixth now shakes heaven and earth and confronts humanity with the wrath of the One upon the throne and of the Lamb.

This is precisely the kind of transition we should expect as the prophetic period approaches its decisive crisis. The opening birth pangs have intensified tremendously. Human society has been destabilized, multitudes have died, the testimony of God has encountered persecution, and now the physical creation itself is shaken. The seventh seal has not yet been opened, but the first six have brought the prophetic drama to a tremendous threshold.

The First Six Seals and the Opening Three and One-Half Years

We must again distinguish what Scripture explicitly states from the prophetic synthesis being proposed. Revelation nowhere says in a single sentence that "the first six seals constitute the first three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week." To claim that the text makes such an explicit chronological statement would go beyond what is written. The proposed placement instead arises from reading Daniel 9, Matthew 24, and Revelation 6 together.

Daniel supplies the seven-year framework and explicitly divides it at the midpoint. Matthew describes a sequence beginning with false Christs and proceeding through wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and martyrdom. The Lord calls these initial developments "the beginning of sorrows." He then points directly to Daniel's abomination of desolation and only afterward declares, "For then there will be great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21).

Revelation 6 presents a remarkably similar progression. The first seal introduces deceptive-looking conquest; the second removes peace and brings warfare; the third produces famine and severe scarcity; the fourth brings widespread death; the fifth reveals martyrdom; and the sixth introduces tremendous terrestrial and cosmic disturbance. The correspondence is not perfect in

every detail, nor should we force it to become so. Nevertheless, the cumulative sequence strongly resembles the Lord's description of the beginning birth pangs.

This provides a coherent basis for locating the first six seals principally within the opening half of Daniel's seventieth week. The seventh seal would then stand at a decisive transition, opening into the trumpet judgments and the increasingly severe divine administration associated with the latter portion of the final seven years. Such an arrangement preserves Daniel's midpoint, takes seriously the Lord's distinction between the beginning of sorrows and the Great Tribulation, and respects the forward movement of Revelation from the throne to the scroll and from the scroll to the successive opening of its seals.

The importance of this synthesis extends beyond arranging prophetic events on a timeline. It affects how we understand the entire seven-sealed scroll. If the first seals are stretched backward across the church age, the relationship between Revelation 6 and the Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24 becomes much less immediate. If, however, they belong principally to the opening half of the final seven years, Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation begin to form an unusually coherent prophetic progression.

Daniel gives us the chronological skeleton. The Lord Jesus supplies the sequence of birth pangs and identifies the decisive midpoint by referring to Daniel. Revelation then opens the heavenly scroll and shows in vivid symbolic form the catastrophic events through which the old governmental and created order begins moving toward its termination. The first six seals are therefore not the consummation of the transition. They are its tremendous opening movements.

The seventh seal will take us considerably deeper. Unlike the preceding seals, it opens into another series of judgments, the seven trumpets. This nested structure becomes essential for understanding the remainder of the Tribulation period. The seven-sealed scroll does not simply conclude when its final seal is opened; rather, the seventh seal expands into the trumpet judgments and carries the prophetic administration forward toward the final outpouring of divine wrath, the destruction of the old rebellious order, the establishment of Christ's kingdom, and ultimately the New Jerusalem.

VI. The Seventh Seal Opens the Massive Final Phase of the Prophetic Program

An Interlude Before the Seventh Seal

After the tremendous disturbances accompanying the sixth seal, Revelation does not proceed immediately to the opening of the seventh. Instead, Revelation 7 interrupts the sequence with an important explanatory interlude. The sixth seal has brought the prophetic movement to an extraordinary threshold. The earth is shaken, the heavenly bodies are disturbed, human beings of every social rank seek refuge, and the inhabitants of the earth recognize that they are confronting the wrath of the One who sits upon the throne and of the Lamb (Rev. 6:12–17). Yet before the final seal of the scroll is opened, John is shown two remarkable groups of people under God's particular care.

The first scene concerns the 144,000 sealed from the tribes of the children of Israel (Rev. 7:1–8). Four angels are temporarily restraining the destructive winds of the earth while another angel

ascends from the east possessing the seal of the living God. The command is given, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (Rev. 7:3). Whatever conclusions are reached concerning all the details of the 144,000, the placement of this scene is significant. Before the judgments advance into their next and more severe phase, God demonstrates that He knows those who belong to Him and is able to mark out His servants in the midst of the approaching devastation.

John then sees "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). When John is asked concerning their identity, he is told, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14). Revelation 7 therefore does more than interrupt the sequence of the seals. It provides an explanatory perspective upon God's people immediately before the seventh seal opens the next enormous phase of the prophetic program.

This kind of interruption is characteristic of Revelation. The prophetic narrative does not always proceed as a simple uninterrupted chronology. At strategic points John is given additional visions that explain persons, conditions, or events necessary for understanding the larger prophetic movement. Revelation 7 should therefore not be treated as though it were an eighth seal inserted between the sixth and seventh. The seven-sealed structure remains intact. Chapter 7 is an explanatory interlude situated between the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6 and the opening of the seventh seal in Revelation 8.

The Seventh Seal Is Fundamentally Different from the First Six

When the Lamb finally opens the seventh seal, the character of the vision changes dramatically. John writes, "When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev. 8:1). After the tumultuous scenes associated with the preceding seals, this silence is striking. Heaven itself appears to become solemnly still before what is about to occur.

The seventh seal differs structurally from each of the preceding six. The first seal releases the rider upon the white horse. The second releases the fiery red horse. The third introduces the black horse and famine. The fourth brings the pale horse and widespread death. The fifth reveals the martyrs beneath the altar. The sixth brings enormous terrestrial and cosmic disturbance. Each seal unveils a distinguishable scene or development.

The seventh seal does something much larger. Immediately after its opening John sees "the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets" (Rev. 8:2). Thus the seventh seal does not merely add one more judgment comparable in scope to the preceding six. Its opening introduces an entirely new series of seven.

This structural feature is essential for understanding the remainder of Revelation. The seventh seal functions as the opening into a vastly enlarged prophetic sequence. What had begun with the successive breaking of individual seals now expands into the sounding of seven trumpets. The prophetic administration becomes increasingly concentrated and increasingly severe as the old order moves toward its termination.

The Seventh Seal as a Massive Prophetic Container

The structure can be pictured as a large container whose contents are progressively disclosed. The first six seals are opened successively, but when the seventh is opened, the reader discovers that considerably more lies within it. The seven trumpets now emerge, and the narrative continues through them into increasingly severe divine judgments.

The analogy of nested Russian dolls is useful here. A large outer doll is opened and another is discovered within it; that doll in turn opens into another. In a similar structural sense, the seventh seal does not merely terminate the seal sequence. It opens into the trumpet sequence. The reader therefore discovers that the seventh seal possesses an enormous internal scope.

The analogy should not be pressed beyond what Revelation itself shows. A Russian doll is only an illustration of the telescoping literary structure; it is not itself an interpretation supplied by the text. What the text does show clearly is that the opening of the seventh seal is followed immediately by the introduction of the seven trumpets. Consequently, the seventh seal cannot be treated merely as another isolated judgment standing alongside the first six. Its scope is qualitatively different.

This also explains why the seven-sealed scroll remains fundamental even after Revelation 8. The trumpet judgments are not unrelated events appended to the scroll after the seals have finished. They arise when the seventh seal is opened. The prophetic administration contained within the scroll is therefore still unfolding. The seventh seal becomes the great doorway through which the later judgments proceed.

The Seventh Seal and the Latter Three and One-Half Years

Within the Daniel-Matthew-Revelation correlation developed throughout this writing, this structural transition provides a coherent location for the movement into the latter half of Daniel's seventieth week. Daniel has already established that the final week is divided “in the middle of the week” (Dan. 9:27). The Lord has identified the abomination of desolation spoken of through Daniel as the decisive signal and then declared, “For then there will be great tribulation” (Matt. 24:15, 21). Revelation has carried us through the first six seals, whose sequence corresponds substantially to the Lord's description of the beginning birth pangs.

The seventh seal can therefore be understood as opening the massive final phase associated especially with the latter three and one-half years. This interpretation should again be distinguished from an explicit chronological statement. Revelation 8:1 does not say, “The seventh seal begins exactly at the midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week.” The proposed relationship is a prophetic synthesis derived from correlating Daniel's divided week, the Lord's sequence in Matthew 24, and the structural progression of Revelation.

Nevertheless, the correspondence is compelling. The first six seals have already brought conquest, warfare, scarcity, death, martyrdom, and cosmic disturbance. Then comes an explanatory interlude. When the seventh seal finally opens, the prophetic structure suddenly expands into the seven trumpets. The intensity of the judgments subsequently increases, while

Revelation begins to employ the very chronological expressions that correspond to Daniel's divided final week.

The distinction between the first and second halves must therefore not be understood as though the first half were insignificant. As the preceding section demonstrated, the first six seals themselves portray catastrophic conditions. The distinction is one of prophetic progression and intensification. The opening half contains the beginning birth pangs; the latter half moves into the unparalleled Great Tribulation of which the Lord said, “such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

Forty-Two Months, 1,260 Days, and a Time, Times, and Half a Time

One of the strongest reasons for recognizing a distinct latter three-and-one-half-year period is the remarkable repetition of equivalent chronological expressions in Revelation. Revelation 11:2 speaks of the holy city being trodden underfoot by the Gentiles for forty-two months. The following verse speaks of God's two witnesses prophesying for 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3). These expressions correspond to a period of three and one-half prophetic years.

The same measurement appears again in Revelation 12. The woman flees into the wilderness, where God has prepared a place for her and where she is nourished for 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6). Later in the same chapter, the corresponding period is expressed differently: she is nourished “for a time and times and half a time” from the presence of the serpent (Rev. 12:14). The three expressions—forty-two months, 1,260 days, and a time, times, and half a time—converge upon the same three-and-one-half-year period.

Revelation 13:5 provides yet another crucial occurrence. The beast is given authority “to continue for forty-two months.” Thus the activity of the beast, the trampling of the holy city, the testimony of the two witnesses, and the preservation of the woman are all described within this recurring three-and-one-half-year framework. Revelation is therefore not merely describing an undefined final period of trouble. It repeatedly measures a particular interval corresponding remarkably with the half-week already established by Daniel.

Daniel supplies the prophetic precedent for this terminology. His final week is explicitly divided at its midpoint, and elsewhere Daniel describes the climactic period as “a time and times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25; 12:7). Revelation's repeated use of the same chronological framework strongly connects John's visions with Daniel's prophecy. What Daniel sees in prophetic outline, Revelation unfolds in considerably greater detail.

The recurrence of these measurements is therefore extremely important for the synthesis being developed. Daniel provides the seven years and their midpoint. Matthew identifies the abomination of desolation as the decisive transition into the Great Tribulation. Revelation repeatedly measures the climactic period in forms equivalent to three and one-half years. These are not three unrelated prophetic systems. They converge upon the same final crisis.

From the Trumpets toward the Final Intensification

The trumpet judgments demonstrate that the seventh seal has opened a substantially more severe phase. The first trumpet brings hail and fire mingled with blood, affecting the earth and

vegetation (Rev. 8:7). The second affects the sea (Rev. 8:8–9). The third strikes the rivers and springs of water (Rev. 8:10–11). The fourth affects the sun, moon, and stars (Rev. 8:12). The sphere of judgment extends throughout the created environment upon which human life depends.

After the fourth trumpet, the progression becomes still more ominous. John hears an angel flying through the midst of heaven proclaiming, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth" because of the remaining three trumpet blasts (Rev. 8:13). The final three trumpets are therefore distinguished as three woes. The text itself signals increasing severity.

The fifth trumpet opens the abyss and introduces a terrifying demonic judgment (Rev. 9:1–11). The sixth trumpet releases destructive forces associated with the great river Euphrates and results in death on an enormous scale (Rev. 9:13–21). By this stage the character of the judgments has moved far beyond the opening horsemen. The prophetic pressure is intensifying as the divine administration advances toward its conclusion.

Yet even the trumpet sequence does not exhaust the judgments of Revelation. Later the seven bowls are poured out, and Revelation explicitly calls them "the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" (Rev. 15:1). The movement is therefore one of increasing concentration: seals give way to trumpets, and the prophetic administration ultimately reaches the bowls in which divine wrath is brought to completion.

This is why the seventh seal can appropriately be described as opening a massive final phase of the prophetic program. Its importance cannot be measured merely by the brief statement that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. What follows that silence reveals its magnitude. Seven angels receive seven trumpets, and from that point the judgments advance through an increasingly intense series of events that eventually terminate the rebellious world order.

The Telescoping Structure of the Final Judgments

The Russian-doll analogy becomes particularly useful when considering the overall architecture. The seventh seal opens into the seven trumpets. The trumpet sequence carries the prophecy forward toward the completion of God's mystery and the transfer of the world's kingdom to Christ. Later the final bowls bring God's wrath to its concentrated completion. The judgments are therefore not best understood as three unrelated lists casually placed one after another.

Revelation itself provides structural connections among them. The trumpets appear only after the seventh seal is opened. The bowls appear later as the seven last plagues completing the wrath of God. There is therefore an unmistakable movement toward finality. The prophetic judgments become increasingly concentrated until the old rebellious order can no longer continue.

The seventh trumpet is particularly significant in this progression. When it sounds, loud voices in heaven declare, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). This declaration reaches back to the very expectation established in Daniel. Daniel 2 foresaw the stone striking the image of

human government and becoming a great mountain filling the whole earth. Daniel 7 foresaw dominion being given to the Son of Man. Revelation now announces the corresponding transfer of the kingdom.

Thus the prophetic movement that began with Daniel's vision of the termination of human government is steadily approaching its objective. The seals are not disasters without purpose. The trumpets are not random catastrophes. The bowls are not uncontrolled explosions of divine anger. They form part of God's governmental administration by which the rebellious old order is judged and the earth is brought under the rightful authority of Christ.

The Great Tribulation Is a Transition, Not the Final Destination

This perspective prevents the Great Tribulation from becoming the ultimate subject of the prophecy. Its events are terrible, and Revelation devotes considerable attention to them, but the Tribulation is not God's final goal. It is part of the colossal transition from the old creation to the new.

The prophetic movement therefore must always be followed beyond the judgments themselves. Daniel sees human government replaced by the kingdom of God. Matthew 24 moves through the Great Tribulation toward the coming of the Son of Man. Revelation moves through the seals, trumpets, bowls, the destruction of Babylon, the appearing of Christ, the kingdom, the final judgment, and ultimately the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem.

This larger perspective explains the importance of the seven-sealed scroll to the title and argument of this writing. The scroll stands at the beginning of the heavenly execution of the final prophetic program. Its first six seals correspond coherently to the opening birth pangs. Its seventh seal opens the massive latter phase in which the judgments become progressively more severe and the final three-and-one-half-year period comes increasingly into view.

The seventh seal is therefore not merely the last item in a list of seven. Structurally, it is the great opening through which the remainder of the final prophetic administration unfolds. Once it is opened, the movement toward the termination of the old rebellious order accelerates dramatically. The trumpets sound, the measured three-and-one-half-year period repeatedly appears, the beast exercises his temporary authority, divine judgments intensify, and the prophecy advances inexorably toward the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Yet even the kingdom is not the final terminus. Beyond the thousand years lies the final judgment, beyond the final judgment lies the new heaven and new earth, and within that new creation John sees the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:1–2). The seventh seal therefore belongs to an enormous prophetic movement whose ultimate destination is not destruction but consummation. What begins with the opening of the seven-sealed scroll ultimately concludes with an entirely new order in which the former things have passed away and God declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

VII. The Seventh Seal Ultimately Unfolds Through Revelation 20

The Seventh Seal Extends Beyond the Great Tribulation

The opening of the seventh seal in Revelation 8 marks the beginning of the massive final phase of the prophetic program, but the consequences released through that seal should not necessarily be confined to the remaining three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week. The preceding section established the seventh seal as a vast prophetic container whose opening introduces the seven trumpets and the increasingly concentrated judgments that follow. Once this telescoping structure is recognized, an important further question arises: Where does the enormous complex initiated by the seventh seal finally terminate?

The answer appears to carry us considerably beyond the immediate judgments of the Great Tribulation. The seventh seal opens into the trumpet sequence, but the trumpet sequence itself advances toward the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Revelation then continues through the explanatory visions concerning the central participants in the final conflict, the seven bowls, the destruction of Babylon the Great, the appearing of Christ, the destruction of the beast and false prophet, the imprisonment of Satan, the millennial kingdom, Satan's final rebellion, and the great white throne judgment. Only after these tremendous governmental dealings have been completed does Revelation 21 introduce the new heaven and new earth.

This distinction is important. The seventh seal may begin its principal operation in connection with the latter portion of the final seven years without everything proceeding from it being completed within those three and one-half years. The seventh seal initiates a governmental sequence whose consequences continue until every remaining hostile element belonging to the old rebellious order has received its final disposition. In this sense, the seventh seal reaches far beyond the immediate horrors of the Great Tribulation.

The scale of the seventh seal therefore becomes even greater than might initially be apparent from Revelation 8:1–2. What begins with silence in heaven and seven angels receiving seven trumpets ultimately participates in a prophetic movement extending through Revelation 20. The final termination of the old order requires considerably more than the conclusion of the Tribulation. The beast must be destroyed. The false prophet must be destroyed. Satan must be bound, later released, and finally cast into the lake of fire. The dead must be judged. Death and Hades themselves must be abolished. Only then is the way completely cleared for the new creation.

The Seventh Trumpet Announces the Coming Kingdom

The trumpet sequence advances toward a tremendous declaration when the seventh angel sounds. John hears loud voices in heaven proclaiming, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). This announcement marks one of the great turning points in Revelation.

The significance of this declaration becomes especially clear when Revelation is read together with Daniel. Daniel 2 had already revealed that the long history of human government represented by the great image would eventually be terminated by the stone cut out without hands. That stone would become a great mountain and fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:34–35, 44–

45). Daniel 7 likewise revealed the beastly kingdoms reaching their judgment and dominion being given to the Son of Man (Dan. 7:9–14). Revelation 11:15 now announces the corresponding governmental transfer in unmistakable terms.

The seventh trumpet therefore carries the prophetic program toward the very objective anticipated centuries earlier through Daniel. Human government does not continue indefinitely. Neither Satan nor the beast possesses permanent authority. The kingdoms of this world are destined to become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. What Daniel saw in prophetic outline, Revelation presents within the unfolding administration of the seven-sealed scroll.

Yet the announcement of the kingdom in Revelation 11 does not mean that every opposing power has already disappeared from the narrative. Considerable conflict remains to be unveiled. Revelation repeatedly announces realities from the heavenly standpoint before subsequently showing the events through which those realities are executed upon the earth. The seventh trumpet announces the certainty of Christ's kingdom, while the succeeding chapters disclose the spiritual conflict and judgments associated with bringing the rebellious order to its appointed end.

Revelation 12–14 Explains the Spiritual Conflict

Revelation 12–14 forms another major explanatory portion of the book. The prophetic narrative turns from the direct progression of judgments to unveil the deeper spiritual realities underlying the visible conflict upon the earth. John sees the woman, the male child, the great red dragon, warfare in heaven, the casting down of Satan, the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth, the 144,000 upon Mount Zion, the proclamation of heavenly messages, and finally the harvest and the winepress.

The great red dragon is explicitly identified as "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). The imagery therefore reaches backward to the serpent of Genesis while simultaneously pointing toward Satan's final activity at the consummation of the age. The conflict occurring during the final prophetic period is not merely political or military. Behind the earthly actors stands the ancient adversary who has opposed God's purpose from the beginning.

Revelation 12 also brings the matter of overcoming into this tremendous conflict. The overcoming ones defeat the accuser "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony," and they do not love their lives unto death (Rev. 12:11). Thus overcoming, first introduced repeatedly in the Lord's speaking to the seven churches, reappears within the central spiritual conflict of the prophetic period. The Lord's call to overcome in Revelation 2–3 was therefore not an incidental exhortation. Overcoming belongs intrinsically to the movement of the entire book.

Revelation 13 then unveils the beast and the false religious-prophetic power associated with him. The beast receives authority for forty-two months (Rev. 13:5), again connecting the vision with the measured three-and-one-half-year period already encountered elsewhere in Revelation. The conflict becomes concentrated around worship, allegiance, persecution, and the authority temporarily exercised by the beast.

Revelation 14 presents another perspective. The 144,000 appear with the Lamb upon Mount Zion and are described as "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4). Later in the chapter the earth is reaped as a harvest (Rev. 14:14–16), followed by the gathering of the vine of the earth into the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:17–20). The imagery of firstfruits and harvest introduces the thought of ripening and maturity within the prophetic consummation. The explanatory visions therefore reveal not only the activities of Satan and the beast but also God's work among His people as the age moves toward its harvest.

The Seven Bowls Bring the Wrath of God to Completion

Revelation 15 introduces another series of seven, but this series possesses an explicitly terminal character. John sees "seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" (Rev. 15:1). The bowls are therefore not simply another repetition of the earlier judgments. They bring the divine wrath toward its consummation.

Revelation 16 records the pouring out of these seven bowls. The judgments affect the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water, the sun, the throne of the beast, the Euphrates, and finally the air. The progression is rapid and severe. By this stage the prophetic program has reached a degree of concentration far beyond the earlier opening seals.

The sixth bowl prepares the way for the gathering associated with Armageddon (Rev. 16:12–16). The kings of the earth are gathered for the great conflict, and demonic activity is explicitly involved in bringing them together. Again Revelation allows the reader to see behind visible geopolitical developments into the spiritual forces operating within the final rebellion.

Then the seventh bowl is poured into the air, and a loud voice from the temple of heaven, from the throne, announces, "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17). An unprecedented earthquake follows, and the cities of the nations fall. The judgment has reached an extraordinary culmination.

At this point Revelation makes a statement that prepares directly for the following chapters: "And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (Rev. 16:19). Babylon has now come before God for final governmental dealing. Revelation 17–18 will pause the forward movement in order to provide an enlarged explanation of this mysterious and enormous entity and her destruction.

Babylon the Great Is Brought to Her Final End

Revelation 17 introduces "Mystery, Babylon the Great" and provides a detailed vision of the woman sitting upon the scarlet beast. Revelation 18 then portrays the fall of Babylon from another perspective, emphasizing the vast earthly system associated with her wealth, commerce, luxury, corruption, and influence among the nations.

The placement of these chapters after the seventh bowl is significant. Revelation 16 has already announced that Babylon was remembered before God. Chapters 17 and 18 enlarge that announcement and explain the object of this judgment. Once again Revelation interrupts straightforward chronological progression in order to disclose the nature and destiny of a crucial participant in the prophetic drama.

Babylon represents something that must be removed before the final manifestation of God's consummate building. The contrast with the New Jerusalem becomes increasingly striking as the book progresses. Revelation presents two enormous corporate entities near its conclusion: Babylon the Great and the holy city, New Jerusalem. One is judged and destroyed; the other descends out of heaven from God. One belongs to the old rebellious order; the other belongs to God's eternal consummation.

The destruction of Babylon is therefore much more than another isolated judgment. It belongs to the clearing away of the old order. Heaven responds to her fall with rejoicing, and Revelation 19 begins with a great multitude praising God because His judgments are true and righteous and because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth (Rev. 19:1–2).

Christ Appears and Destroys the Beast and False Prophet

Revelation 19 then unveils the event toward which the preceding judgments have been moving: the victorious appearing of Christ. John sees heaven opened and beholds a white horse. Unlike the rider of the first seal, this Rider is explicitly and unmistakably identified. He is called "Faithful and True," He judges and makes war in righteousness, and "His name is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:11–13).

The contrast with Revelation 6 is now complete. At the beginning of the seal sequence a rider upon a white horse went forth conquering and to conquer. Here, near the consummation of the conflict, the genuine Christ appears from heaven in unmistakable majesty and authority. The armies in heaven follow Him, and He comes to strike the nations and exercise divine governmental authority.

The beast and the kings of the earth gather to make war against the Rider and His army (Rev. 19:19). Their rebellion ends decisively. The beast is captured, together with the false prophet who performed signs before him, and both are cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). The political and false-prophetic powers that dominated the final crisis are therefore brought to their appointed end.

Yet even this tremendous victory does not completely terminate the old rebellious order. One enemy remains whose history reaches much farther back than the beast or false prophet. Revelation must still deal with Satan himself.

Satan Is Bound and the Thousand-Year Kingdom Begins

Revelation 20 opens with an angel descending from heaven possessing the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He lays hold of "the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan," binds him for one thousand years, and casts him into the abyss (Rev. 20:1–3). The identification deliberately recalls Revelation 12 and, beyond Revelation 12, Genesis 3. The ancient serpent who entered the biblical record near its beginning is now forcibly removed from activity upon the earth.

The reason for Satan's imprisonment is explicitly stated: "so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:3). The millennial kingdom therefore

begins with the deceiver restrained. The one who had deceived the nations and energized rebellion against God is confined while Christ exercises His kingdom upon the earth.

John then sees thrones and those to whom judgment is committed. He particularly mentions those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark. "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

The matter of overcoming introduced in Revelation 2–3 thus reaches a magnificent kingdom expression. The saints who remain faithful to Christ even unto death participate in His reign. Revelation 20:6 declares, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection," and adds that "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

The millennial kingdom is therefore a tremendous stage in the transition, but even it is not the final destination. One thousand years of Christ's manifested reign still does not constitute the new heaven and new earth. Revelation must carry the divine governmental dealing beyond the Millennium itself.

Satan's Final Rebellion and Eternal Judgment

Revelation 20:7 contains an astonishing statement: "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison." This immediately demonstrates that the prophetic program has moved far beyond Daniel's seventieth week. The final three and one-half years are long past. The thousand-year kingdom itself has now run its appointed course.

Satan goes out once more to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, identified symbolically as Gog and Magog, and gathers them together for battle (Rev. 20:8). Even after one thousand years of Christ's righteous reign, Satan is able to find human beings willing to participate in a final rebellion against God.

The rebellion is extraordinarily brief. The hostile multitude surrounds the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them (Rev. 20:9). There is no prolonged final war. God terminates the rebellion directly.

Then comes the eternal disposition of Satan: "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are" (Rev. 20:10). The ancient serpent has reached his final destination. He will never again emerge to deceive, accuse, tempt, corrupt, or rebel.

This is a monumental point in the biblical story. The adversary who appeared in Genesis 3 has now been permanently removed in Revelation 20. His career extends across virtually the entire history of the old creation, but it does not extend into the new heaven and new earth.

The Great White Throne and the Final Judgment of the Dead

Even after Satan has been cast into the lake of fire, one final governmental scene remains. John sees "a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled

away" (Rev. 20:11). The imagery is breathtaking. The old heaven and earth themselves can no longer remain before the face of the One sitting upon the throne.

John sees the dead, small and great, standing before God. Books are opened, and the dead are judged according to their works (Rev. 20:12). The sea gives up the dead within it, and Death and Hades deliver up the dead within them. Nothing remains concealed or beyond the reach of divine judgment.

Then comes one of the most significant statements concerning the termination of the old order: "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14). Death itself, which entered human experience through the fall and has dominated the old creation throughout human history, is finally removed. Hades likewise reaches its termination.

The lake of fire is identified as the second death, and anyone not found written in the Book of Life is cast into it (Rev. 20:14–15). The governmental judgments of the old creation have now reached their ultimate conclusion. Satan has been eternally judged. The beast and false prophet are gone. The rebellious dead have been judged. Death and Hades themselves have been abolished from the coming order.

Only now is Revelation prepared to say, "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

The Seventh Seal Carries the Old Order to Its Complete Termination

We can now appreciate the enormous scope of the seventh seal. It begins in Revelation 8 with silence in heaven and the introduction of the seven trumpets. Yet the governmental movement released through it cannot be adequately understood if it is restricted merely to the remaining years of the Tribulation. The sequence ultimately carries the prophetic program through the judgments connected with the final crisis and onward toward the complete removal of everything belonging to the rebellious old order.

The seventh trumpet announces the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. Revelation 12–14 unveils the deeper spiritual conflict involving Satan, the beast, persecution, overcoming, firstfruits, and harvest. Revelation 15–16 brings the wrath of God toward completion through the seven bowls. Revelation 17–18 enlarges the judgment of Babylon the Great. Revelation 19 unveils Christ's victorious appearing and the destruction of the beast and false prophet. Revelation 20 binds Satan, introduces the thousand-year kingdom, records Satan's final rebellion and eternal judgment, and concludes with the great white throne and the casting of Death and Hades into the lake of fire.

The scope is enormous. The seventh seal begins within the final seven-year prophetic period, but its governmental consequences ultimately extend beyond that period, beyond Christ's appearing, and even beyond the thousand-year kingdom. The sequence reaches its ultimate terminus only when the old heaven and old earth pass away and every remaining hostile element of the old order has received its final disposition.

This understanding also gives greater precision to the Russian-doll analogy introduced earlier. The seventh seal is not merely another event occurring after the sixth. It opens a vast internal prophetic complex. Within it the trumpet sequence unfolds; within the advancing administration further explanatory visions and final judgments appear; and the entire movement continues until the old order has been completely dealt with. The seventh seal is therefore enormous not merely because its judgments are severe but because its prophetic reach is so extensive.

The seven-sealed scroll consequently provides an extraordinary structural key to the final portion of Revelation. What begins when the Lamb opens the scroll in Revelation 6 does not concern catastrophe for catastrophe's sake. The Lamb is executing the governmental program necessary to bring the old rebellious creation to its appointed termination.

This brings us directly to the threshold of the ultimate transition. Revelation 20 ends with the great white throne and the final judgment associated with the old creation. Revelation 21 immediately begins with something entirely new: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth." The seven-sealed scroll has carried us through the colossal divine administration necessary for the old order to pass away. What remains is no longer primarily judgment but consummation—the unveiling of the New Jerusalem in the new creation.

VIII. Revelation 21–22: Everything Becomes New

The Great Boundary Between the Old Creation and the New

Revelation 21:1 brings us across one of the greatest boundaries in the entire Bible: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." Everything unfolded through the seven-sealed scroll has brought us to this tremendous point. The judgments have run their course. The rebellious powers have received their appointed end. The thousand-year kingdom has been completed. The final rebellion has been extinguished, the great white throne judgment has taken place, and the old heaven and old earth have passed away. John now sees something altogether new.

This is far more than the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation period. It is even more than the conclusion of the thousand-year kingdom. Revelation has carried us to the termination of the old creation itself. The first heaven and first earth, within which the entire long history of human rebellion, divine judgment, redemption, conflict, suffering, and governmental dealing has unfolded, are no longer present. A new heaven and a new earth have appeared.

This provides the proper perspective from which to understand the enormous prophetic transition developed throughout this writing. The seven-sealed scroll does not ultimately lead merely to the destruction of Antichrist or to the termination of the Great Tribulation. Nor does the prophetic movement stop with Christ establishing His millennial kingdom. The movement continues until the entire old order has reached its appointed conclusion and God introduces an entirely new creation.

The word "new" therefore becomes tremendously significant. Revelation is not concluding merely with the repair of the old. God is bringing His purpose to consummation in a new heaven and a new earth. What had existed under the conditions of the old creation has passed away, and

what John now beholds belongs to an order in which the great enemies and problems that characterized the old creation no longer have any place.

Everything Belonging to the Old Rebellious Order Is Gone

By the time Revelation 21 begins, the prophetic landscape has been completely transformed. Babylon the Great is gone. The beast is gone. The false prophet is gone. Satan is gone. Death and Hades are gone. Finally, the first heaven and first earth themselves have passed away. The enormous governmental dealings unfolded throughout Revelation have accomplished their purpose.

Babylon the Great had represented an immense corrupting power within the old order, but Revelation 17–18 records her destruction. The beast and false prophet, who dominate the final rebellion against Christ, are cast alive into the lake of fire at His appearing (Rev. 19:20). Satan, the ancient serpent whose activity reaches back to Genesis, is finally cast into the lake of fire after his last rebellion (Rev. 20:10). Death and Hades are likewise cast into the lake of fire following the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:14).

The progression is extraordinary because Revelation does not merely show God defeating individual enemies while leaving the underlying old order intact. The divine judgment proceeds until everything incompatible with the eternal purpose of God has been removed. The old creation itself finally passes away.

This makes the movement from Revelation 20 to Revelation 21 particularly magnificent. Revelation 20 closes with judgment; Revelation 21 opens with newness. Revelation 20 presents the great white throne before which earth and heaven flee away; Revelation 21 presents a new heaven and a new earth. The former order has reached its conclusion, and the eternal order now appears.

The colossal transition has therefore been completed. What Daniel saw as the termination of human government has ultimately expanded into something much greater. Human government must end, but so must the entire rebellious system associated with Satan, death, Hades, and the old creation. God's purpose cannot consummate merely in replacing one earthly government with another. His ultimate purpose requires an entirely new creation.

New Jerusalem Descends Out of Heaven from God

Immediately after seeing the new heaven and new earth, John sees the central object of the final biblical vision: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). The Bible does not end merely with a new environment. It ends with a city.

This city comes “out of heaven from God.” Its source is therefore divine. New Jerusalem is not the culmination of human civilization gradually improving itself until it finally constructs an ideal society. Neither is it the ultimate achievement of human government, religion, philosophy, science, or culture. It descends out of heaven from God. Its source, nature, preparation, and ultimate manifestation are associated with God Himself.

Yet New Jerusalem is also presented as a bride. The city is therefore not merely a physical metropolis considered apart from the redeemed people of God. John is shown "the bride, the Lamb's wife," and what he subsequently sees is "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:9–10). The bridal and city imagery converge in one consummate vision.

This brings the corporate character of God's purpose into extraordinary clarity. The final vision is not merely of countless redeemed individuals existing separately in a heavenly realm. John sees one corporate entity—the holy city, the bride, the wife of the Lamb. The many redeemed persons have reached a consummate corporate expression.

The entire biblical movement has therefore progressed toward building. Genesis begins with a garden, but Revelation concludes with a city. Throughout the Scriptures God works among human beings to obtain a dwelling place, a people, a kingdom, a bride, and a corporate expression. In New Jerusalem these lines converge. The city is God's dwelling with humanity, the bride of the Lamb, and the consummate corporate expression of God's eternal purpose.

The Tabernacle of God Is with Humanity

A loud voice from heaven interprets the significance of the city: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them" (Rev. 21:3). This declaration reaches into one of the deepest themes running throughout Scripture—the desire of God to dwell with humanity.

God's dwelling is no longer presented as a temporary tabernacle in the wilderness or a temple constructed within the old creation. Nor is His presence localized within one earthly sanctuary. The final consummation is God dwelling with redeemed humanity in an entirely new order.

Revelation 21:3 continues, "They shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." The relationship is direct, permanent, and universal within the new creation. The long history of separation, distance, rebellion, and interruption has ended. God and His redeemed people dwell together.

The following verse describes the corresponding disappearance of the sorrows characteristic of the old creation: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain" (Rev. 21:4). These conditions disappear because "the former things have passed away."

The expression "former things" gathers an enormous history into a few words. Death had entered the human experience near the beginning of Genesis. Sorrow, pain, tears, conflict, and loss followed within the fallen creation. Revelation does not end by teaching humanity how to accommodate itself permanently to these conditions. It ends with their disappearance.

Then the One sitting upon the throne declares, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). This declaration could appropriately stand over the entire final vision. The transition has reached its goal. God does not merely suppress the old rebellion; He brings forth the new.

The Final Vision Is Consummation Rather Than Destruction

The severity of Revelation's judgments can easily dominate one's impression of the book. Seals are opened, trumpets sound, bowls are poured out, Babylon falls, armies are destroyed, and the great white throne brings final judgment. Yet destruction is not the final subject of Revelation.

Judgment serves the accomplishment of God's purpose by removing what opposes that purpose. The destination is New Jerusalem. The prophecy moves through judgment because the old rebellious order must be dealt with, but it moves toward consummation because God's intention is to obtain His eternal dwelling and corporate expression.

This distinction is essential. If Revelation is read primarily as a book about catastrophe, the reader can become absorbed with wars, earthquakes, beasts, plagues, persecution, Armageddon, and the lake of fire while missing the direction in which all these events are moving. They are not the destination. They belong to the transition.

The final two chapters correct such an emphasis by presenting what remains after judgment has completed its work. What remains is God, the Lamb, the holy city, the redeemed, the throne, the river of life, the tree of life, light, service, reigning, and eternal fellowship. Revelation ends not with darkness but with light; not with death but with life; not with Babylon but with New Jerusalem.

The entire prophetic program must therefore be interpreted from the standpoint of its consummation. The judgments are governmental and necessary, but they are preparatory. The new creation is God's destination.

The River and the Tree of Life

Revelation 22 brings the final vision back to the matter of life. John is shown “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). In the middle of the street and on either side of the river is “the tree of life” (Rev. 22:2).

The appearance of the tree of life at the conclusion of Scripture immediately recalls Genesis. The tree had appeared near the beginning of the biblical record in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). After humanity's fall, access to the tree was barred (Gen. 3:22–24). Yet the Bible does not abandon the matter. At the end of Revelation, after the entire history of redemption and divine government has run its course, the tree of life appears again.

But the setting has changed dramatically. Genesis presents the tree within a garden; Revelation presents the tree within the holy city. The river of life proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and the tree of life grows in relation to this river. The biblical movement from garden to city has not eliminated life. Rather, life has reached its consummate expression within God's completed building.

This is extremely important for understanding God's eternal purpose. The final state is not merely governmental order. Certainly there is a throne. God and the Lamb exercise eternal authority, and His servants reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:3–5). Yet from that very throne

proceeds the river of water of life. God's authority and God's life are not competing themes in the New Jerusalem. The throne becomes the source from which the river of life flows.

The final consummation therefore brings government and life together. Throughout the prophetic judgments, the throne represents God's authority over the rebellious creation. In New Jerusalem that same throne remains, but what John emphasizes flowing from it is the water of life. The governmental dealings have accomplished their purpose, and the eternal issue is the unhindered flowing and enjoyment of divine life.

The tree of life likewise indicates supply rather than merely regulation. The leaves are for the healing of the nations, and the tree continually bears fruit (Rev. 22:2). The imagery is one of abundance, nourishment, supply, and life. The Bible that began with the tree of life concludes with humanity enjoying the tree of life eternally within God's consummate city.

No More Curse, No More Night

Revelation 22 continues the description of the new order with the remarkable statement, "And there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). The curse introduced into the old creation as a consequence of the fall has disappeared. The throne of God and of the Lamb is in the city, and His servants serve Him.

"They shall see His face" (Rev. 22:4). The distance that characterized fallen humanity's relationship with God has been completely removed. The redeemed do not merely know that God exists somewhere beyond them; they behold His face. His name is upon their foreheads, indicating that they belong to Him and bear His identification.

There is also no night there. The inhabitants need neither lamp nor the light of the sun, "for the Lord God gives them light" (Rev. 22:5). The city possesses God Himself as its illumination. Revelation 21 had already stated that the glory of God illuminates the city and that the Lamb is its lamp (Rev. 21:23). The final order therefore possesses a light that does not depend upon the ordinary luminaries of the old creation.

The verse concludes, "And they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). The kingdom theme that appeared so prominently in Daniel has now reached beyond the millennial kingdom into eternity. The stone that terminated the image of human government led to a kingdom that would never be destroyed. Revelation ultimately carries that expectation into the eternal new creation.

Thus Daniel and Revelation are connected not merely at the level of the final seven years. Daniel's visions begin to reveal the termination of human government and the establishment of God's kingdom. Revelation follows that transition through its immense final development until God's authority, life, dwelling, and corporate expression fill the eternal scene.

Jesus Again Speaks of the Churches

Near the conclusion of this tremendous unveiling, a statement appears that should not be overlooked: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches" (Rev. 22:16). The Lord Jesus Himself again brings the churches into view.

This is especially significant because Revelation began with the churches. John saw seven golden lampstands, and the Lord explicitly explained, "the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). Revelation 2–3 then recorded the Lord's direct epistles to the seven churches in Asia. Those churches stood as golden lampstands bearing His testimony within their respective localities.

After Revelation 3, however, the prophetic perspective changes dramatically. John is called through the opened door in heaven in Revelation 4. He sees the throne, the seven-sealed scroll, and the Lamb. The seals are opened. Trumpets sound. The spiritual conflict is unveiled. Bowls are poured out. Babylon is destroyed. Christ appears. Satan is bound and ultimately judged. The thousand-year kingdom comes and goes. The great white throne appears. The old heaven and earth pass away. New Jerusalem descends within the new creation.

After all of this, Jesus says that He sent His angel to testify "these things in the churches."

The statement forms a remarkable connection between the beginning and conclusion of the book. The churches of Revelation 1–3 are not incidental introductory material that can be detached from the prophetic visions that follow. The Lord's testimony concerning the entire tremendous revelation is for the churches.

The churches standing as golden lampstands at the beginning of Revelation are therefore intended to receive the unveiling of God's ultimate governmental and eternal purpose. They are shown what will happen to the world, what will happen to Satan, what will happen to Babylon, what will happen to the beast, what will happen to death and Hades, and finally what God will obtain in the New Jerusalem.

From the Golden Lampstands to New Jerusalem

There is therefore a magnificent movement from the seven golden lampstands at the beginning of Revelation to the golden city at its conclusion. Revelation begins with Christ walking in the midst of the churches and concludes with the corporate city in which God and the Lamb dwell eternally with redeemed humanity.

The churches are not themselves the final consummation. They belong to the present stage of God's purpose and bear His testimony within the localities during this age. New Jerusalem is the consummate corporate expression toward which the divine purpose moves. Nevertheless, Revelation places these realities within one continuous unveiling.

This gives additional significance to the Lord's concern for overcoming in Revelation 2–3. Each epistle contains a word to the overcomer, and several of those promises reach directly toward the later visions of Revelation. The Lord's speaking to the churches is therefore already oriented toward the kingdom and the ultimate consummation.

The reader should consequently resist treating Revelation 1–3 as one subject and Revelation 4–22 as an entirely unrelated subject. The book itself joins them. The Christ who walks among the golden lampstands is the Lamb who opens the scroll. The Lamb who administers God's judgment

is the Lamb whose wife is New Jerusalem. The churches who receive the Lord's speaking at the beginning are addressed again near the end as the recipients of "these things."

The entire book is one tremendous unveiling.

The Colossal Transition Is Complete

We have now reached the destination toward which Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation have been steadily moving. Daniel revealed that human government would not continue forever. The great image would be struck and replaced by God's kingdom. The beastly kingdoms would be judged, and dominion would be given to the Son of Man. Daniel also supplied the final seventieth week and its decisive midpoint.

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 then described the beginning birth pangs—deception, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and martyrdom—and identified the abomination of desolation spoken of through Daniel as the decisive turning point into the Great Tribulation.

Revelation expanded this prophetic framework enormously. Christ first appeared among the seven golden lampstands. John was then brought into the heavenly scene, where he saw God's throne and the seven-sealed scroll. The Lamb alone was worthy to open it. The first six seals unfolded the opening movements of the final crisis. The seventh seal opened the massive concluding phase, including the trumpet judgments and the subsequent governmental developments extending ultimately through Revelation 20.

Now Revelation 21–22 reveals why all of this had to occur.

The purpose was not destruction for its own sake. God was bringing the old creation, with its accumulated rebellion and corruption, to its appointed termination so that His eternal purpose could stand fully manifested in the new creation. Babylon had to disappear because New Jerusalem would remain. Satan had to disappear because God would dwell openly with humanity. Death had to disappear because the river and tree of life would characterize the eternal city. Darkness had to disappear because the glory of God would illuminate it.

The seven-sealed scroll therefore belongs to a transition of almost unimaginable magnitude. It carries the prophetic program from the final crisis of the old age toward the removal of the entire rebellious order. Yet the ultimate word of Revelation is not seal, trumpet, bowl, beast, Babylon, death, or judgment.

The ultimate word is newness.

"Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

The Bible that began with God's creation of the heavens and the earth concludes with a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible that introduced the tree of life in Genesis concludes with the tree of life in New Jerusalem. The Bible that recorded humanity's separation from God concludes with God dwelling with humanity. The Bible that traced the rise and fall of human kingdoms concludes with the throne of God and of the Lamb. The Bible that recorded the entrance of death

concludes with death abolished. And the Bible that began its final prophetic book with seven golden lampstands concludes with Jesus testifying these tremendous things to the churches and with the holy city, New Jerusalem, standing as the consummate corporate expression of God's eternal purpose.

The transition is complete. The old has passed away.

Everything has become new.

IX. Conclusion: The Lamb Brings the Old Creation to Its End and Introduces the New

One Coherent Prophetic Progression

Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation together present one tremendous prophetic progression extending from the final crisis of human government to the establishment and ultimate consummation of God's eternal purpose. These three portions of Scripture should not be isolated from one another as though Daniel presents one prophetic system, the Lord's words in Matthew another, and Revelation still another. Rather, each successive revelation supplies details that enable us to understand more fully what has already been introduced. Daniel establishes the fundamental prophetic framework, the Lord in Matthew identifies the crucial developments surrounding the consummation of the age, and Revelation opens the matter in extraordinary detail through the seven-sealed scroll. When these portions are allowed to interpret and illuminate one another, a remarkably coherent picture emerges.

Daniel begins with the broadest governmental perspective. Human government, represented by the enormous image of Daniel 2 and by the beasts of Daniel 7, does not continue indefinitely. God has appointed an end to the long succession of human kingdoms, and His kingdom ultimately replaces them (Dan. 2:31–45; 7:9–14). Daniel 9 then narrows the prophetic focus by revealing the seventy weeks and, particularly, the final seventieth week. This last week consists of seven years and contains an explicit midpoint, “in the middle of the week,” at which a decisive change occurs (Dan. 9:27). Daniel therefore provides both the broad governmental destination and the chronological framework necessary for understanding the final crisis.

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 brings this framework into sharper focus. His prophecy begins with deception and false Christs, followed by wars and rumors of wars, international conflict, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, and martyrdom (Matt. 24:4–13). Yet He does not immediately call these conditions the Great Tribulation. He first identifies them as “the beginning of sorrows,” or the beginning birth pangs (Matt. 24:8). Only after referring specifically to “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet” does He say, “For then there will be great tribulation” (Matt. 24:15, 21). The Lord therefore confirms Daniel's framework while providing an important distinction between the opening birth pangs and the unparalleled Great Tribulation that follows the decisive midpoint development.

Revelation then provides the most extensive unveiling of this final transition. The book begins with Christ among the seven golden lampstands, proceeds to the heavenly throne and the seven-sealed scroll, and then shows the Lamb opening the seals one after another. What Daniel presents principally as prophetic framework and what Matthew presents principally as

prophetic description are expanded in Revelation into an enormous sequence of visions. The seals, trumpets, explanatory interludes, bowls, destruction of Babylon, appearing of Christ, millennial kingdom, final judgment, and new creation together reveal the magnitude of the transition. Revelation therefore does not stand independently of Daniel and Matthew but brings their prophetic lines toward their ultimate consummation.

The First Six Seals and the Beginning Birth Pangs

Within this synthesis, the first six seals can reasonably be associated principally with the opening half of Daniel's seventieth week. This conclusion should not be presented as though Revelation explicitly states that seals one through six occupy exactly three and one-half years, because it does not. Rather, the interpretation arises from the remarkable correspondence between the sequence of Revelation 6 and the sequence given by the Lord in Matthew 24. The first seal presents conquest, the second warfare, the third famine, the fourth widespread death, the fifth martyrdom, and the sixth tremendous terrestrial and cosmic disturbance. These developments correspond naturally with the Lord's description of deception, warfare, famine, pestilence, persecution, and the escalating disturbances accompanying the consummation of the age.

The first seal is particularly important because its identification determines how the entire sequence is approached. Although the rider upon the white horse has sometimes been interpreted as Christ or the victorious preaching of the gospel throughout the church age, the context developed in this writing points in another direction. The Lord's own first warning in Matthew 24 concerns deception and false Christs, making this a natural correspondence with the first horseman. Moreover, Revelation 19 removes any ambiguity concerning the identity of Christ when He actually appears upon a white horse: He is explicitly called “Faithful and True,” and His name is “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:11–13). Similar imagery does not require identical identity, and the context of Revelation 6 should determine the interpretation of its first rider.

The first six seals consequently form a coherent progression toward a tremendous threshold. Conquest gives way to warfare, warfare contributes to scarcity, scarcity is followed by widespread death, martyrdom appears before the heavenly altar, and finally the created order itself is shaken. By the sixth seal, kings, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, slaves, and free men alike recognize that something extraordinary is occurring and cry out concerning “the great day of His wrath” (Rev. 6:15–17). The sequence has moved far beyond ordinary historical difficulties. The old world is approaching the concentrated governmental intervention of God.

Yet Revelation pauses before the seventh seal. Chapter 7 provides an explanatory interlude concerning God's people before the prophetic movement enters its next enormous stage. This interruption itself emphasizes the structural importance of what is about to occur. The seventh seal is not simply another judgment of approximately the same magnitude as the preceding six. When it opens, the entire structure of the prophecy expands.

The Seventh Seal Opens the Enormous Latter Phase

The opening of the seventh seal in Revelation 8 represents one of the most important structural transitions in the book. There is first silence in heaven for about half an hour, after which seven angels standing before God receive seven trumpets (Rev. 8:1–2). The seventh seal therefore differs profoundly from each of the first six. Those seals disclose individual scenes or developments, whereas the seventh opens into an additional series of seven. Its disproportionate size is not an interpretive invention imposed upon the text; it arises from the literary structure John actually records.

The analogy of a nested Russian doll remains useful so long as it is treated as an illustration rather than as something explicitly stated in Revelation. The seventh seal is opened, and within the prophetic complex initiated by it the seven trumpets appear. The judgments then become increasingly concentrated as the book advances, ultimately reaching the seven bowls, which are identified as the seven last plagues in which the wrath of God is completed (Rev. 15:1). Thus the seventh seal functions as the great telescoping seal of the prophetic program. Its opening releases a sequence far more extensive than anything introduced by one of the preceding seals.

Within the Daniel-Matthew-Revelation synthesis, this massive transition can reasonably be associated especially with the latter three and one-half years and the Great Tribulation proper. Daniel divides the final week at its midpoint. Matthew places the abomination of desolation at the decisive transition and declares that "then" there will be Great Tribulation. Revelation, as its prophecy progresses, repeatedly employs the equivalent measurements of forty-two months, 1,260 days, and "a time and times and half a time" (Rev. 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). The convergence of these chronological expressions provides substantial grounds for correlating the massive latter phase of Revelation with the latter half of Daniel's seventieth week.

At the same time, the seventh seal cannot be restricted entirely to those three and one-half years. It begins the great final phase associated with the Great Tribulation, but the governmental consequences released through it continue beyond the Tribulation itself. This is essential to the argument developed in the preceding sections. The seventh seal opens a prophetic complex whose ultimate reach extends through the remaining governmental dealings of the old creation. What begins within Daniel's final week ultimately reaches beyond the Millennium itself.

From the Trumpets to the Termination of the Old Order

The seven trumpets carry the divine administration forward with increasing severity. The early trumpets strike the earth, sea, rivers, springs, and heavenly luminaries, while the later trumpets introduce still more terrifying judgments. The final three are explicitly distinguished as woes (Rev. 8:13). By the seventh trumpet, heaven announces, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). The prophetic objective first seen in Daniel is now announced from heaven as approaching its realization.

Revelation 12–14 then opens the spiritual dimension behind the visible conflict. Satan appears as the great red dragon and is explicitly identified as the ancient serpent, the Devil, and Satan (Rev. 12:9). The beast exercises his temporary authority, persecution intensifies, and the matter of overcoming becomes prominent within the final conflict. At the same time, Revelation

presents firstfruits and harvest, indicating that God's purpose among His people continues even amid the tremendous opposition of the final period. The prophetic crisis is therefore not merely a sequence of disasters but a spiritual conflict involving Satan, God's people, maturity, testimony, and the execution of God's purpose.

The seven bowls then bring God's wrath to its consummation. The seventh bowl announces, “It is done!” and specifically declares that great Babylon has been remembered before God (Rev. 16:17, 19). Revelation 17–18 consequently enlarges the judgment of Babylon the Great and records her final destruction. This enormous corrupting entity, which stands in such striking contrast to New Jerusalem, must disappear before the final consummation can be unveiled. The old religious, political, commercial, and rebellious order cannot coexist eternally with the holy city descending out of heaven from God.

Revelation 19 then unveils Christ Himself appearing victoriously from heaven. The beast and false prophet are seized and cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:19–20). Revelation 20 proceeds to the imprisonment of Satan and the thousand-year reign of Christ with His overcoming saints. Yet even the Millennium is not the ultimate destination, because after the thousand years Satan is released, leads one final rebellion, and is permanently cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7–10). The old creation must still proceed to the great white throne before the transition can finally be completed.

The great white throne brings the governmental history of the old order to its final conclusion. The dead are judged, the sea gives up its dead, and Death and Hades surrender the dead within them (Rev. 20:11–13). Then Death and Hades themselves are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Even death, which entered the human experience near the beginning of Genesis, cannot cross the boundary into the eternal new creation. Revelation has now brought the reader to the absolute termination of the old order.

Beyond Judgment Stands the New Creation

Revelation 21:1 therefore constitutes a boundary of extraordinary magnitude: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” The old heaven and old earth have passed away. Babylon is gone, the beast and false prophet are gone, Satan is gone, Death and Hades are gone, and the governmental judgments associated with the old creation have been completed. Everything that follows belongs to the eternal new order. The prophetic transition that began with the final crisis of human government has reached far beyond the replacement of earthly kingdoms and has culminated in the passing away of the old creation itself.

John then sees New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). This is the positive destination toward which the entire book has been moving. Revelation does not conclude with a battlefield, an earthquake, a destroyed Babylon, or even the great white throne. It concludes with a city, a bride, a dwelling place, a river, a tree, a throne, light, life, and God dwelling with redeemed humanity. Judgment has cleared away everything opposed to God's purpose so that the purpose itself can stand unveiled without obstruction.

The final chapters consequently reveal that God's eternal intention is much more than governmental victory. Government is necessary because rebellion must be judged, but judgment is not God's final expression. From the throne of God and of the Lamb proceeds the river of water of life, and beside that river grows the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–2). The throne remains, but the issue proceeding from the throne is life. The consummation is therefore not merely a universe brought under authority but a new creation filled with the expression and enjoyment of divine life.

The movement from Genesis to Revelation can now be seen with remarkable clarity. Genesis introduces the tree of life, but fallen humanity is barred from it. Revelation concludes with the tree of life freely available within the holy city. Genesis records the entrance of the serpent, sin, death, curse, sorrow, and separation; Revelation concludes with the serpent gone, death abolished, the curse removed, tears wiped away, and God's servants seeing His face. The entire biblical history between these two ends reveals God's work to accomplish this colossal transition.

The Churches Stand at the Beginning and Near the End

It is also significant that this final prophetic book begins and nearly ends with explicit references to the churches. Revelation 1 presents Christ walking among seven golden lampstands, and the Lord Himself identifies those lampstands as “the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20). Revelation 2–3 then records His direct speaking to the churches concerning their actual conditions and their need to overcome. These were genuine local churches, each identified with its locality, and despite serious weaknesses in some of them the Lord still recognized them as golden lampstands. The book therefore begins with Christ's intimate concern for His testimony expressed in the churches.

After the speaking to the churches has been completed, John is called upward through an opened door in heaven “after these things” (Rev. 4:1). From that heavenly position he sees God's throne and eventually the seven-sealed scroll in the hand of the One sitting upon the throne. The Lamb takes the scroll and begins to open its seals. From this point the prophetic horizon expands enormously, moving through the final crisis, divine judgments, Christ's appearing, the kingdom, the final judgment, and New Jerusalem. Yet near the conclusion Jesus again says, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches” (Rev. 22:16).

This return to the churches should not be treated as incidental. The churches addressed at the beginning are the recipients of the tremendous unveiling contained in the book. They are shown the ultimate destiny of human government, Babylon, the beast, Satan, death, the old creation, and God's redeemed people. They are shown not merely what is coming upon the earth but what God ultimately intends to obtain. The churches therefore stand within the present age as golden lampstands while looking toward the consummate corporate expression of God's purpose in New Jerusalem.

There is consequently a magnificent line running from the golden lampstands to the golden city. Christ walks among the lampstands at the beginning; God and the Lamb are the center of New Jerusalem at the end. The churches bear God's testimony during the present age; New Jerusalem

becomes the consummate corporate expression in eternity. The call to overcome given repeatedly in Revelation 2–3 reaches forward into the kingdom and the final consummation. The beginning and ending of Revelation therefore belong together within one continuous unveiling of God's purpose.

The Lamb Is the Central Figure of the Entire Transition

At the center of this entire prophetic movement stands neither Antichrist nor Satan, neither Babylon nor the judgments, but the Lamb. Revelation 5 makes this unmistakably clear. John weeps because no one is found worthy to open the scroll or even to look at it, but then he is told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed (Rev. 5:2–5). When John looks, however, he sees "a Lamb as though it had been slain" standing in the midst of the throne (Rev. 5:6). The One who has accomplished redemption is the One qualified to take the scroll and execute the divine program contained within it.

This is profoundly significant because the final transition is therefore entrusted to the crucified and victorious Christ. The Lamb opens every seal. The judgments do not proceed from an uncontrolled universe descending into chaos but from the deliberate governmental administration of God executed through the worthy Lamb. Even when the prophetic scenes become terrifying, the scroll remains in His hands. The entire process moves according to the divine purpose toward an appointed conclusion.

The Lamb also connects the opening chapters of Revelation with its final chapters. The One walking among the seven golden lampstands is the One who takes the scroll. The Lamb who opens the scroll is the One whose wrath confronts the rebellious world. The victorious Christ who appears in Revelation 19 is the same One whose marriage is celebrated and whose wife is prepared. Finally, New Jerusalem is repeatedly identified in relation to the Lamb: it is "the Lamb's wife," the Lamb is its lamp, the throne is "the throne of God and of the Lamb," and the river of life proceeds from that throne (Rev. 21:9, 23; 22:1, 3).

The Lamb is therefore not merely the initiator of the transition but its central figure from beginning to consummation. Through His redemptive accomplishment He is worthy to open the scroll; through His governmental authority He executes God's judgments; through His victorious appearing He destroys the final rebellious powers; through His kingdom He reigns; and in New Jerusalem He remains eternally joined to His redeemed corporate counterpart. The final city is not simply God's city but the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Redemption, government, kingdom, life, and eternal union converge in Him.

This perspective also prevents the prophetic details from becoming detached from Christ Himself. It is possible to become occupied with calculating periods, arranging seals and trumpets, identifying prophetic actors, and tracing judgments while losing sight of the Person who stands at the center of the entire unveiling. Revelation does not present an impersonal timetable. It presents Jesus Christ as the Lamb carrying God's purpose through the termination of the old order and into the eternal new creation. The prophecy is ultimately Christ-centered because God's eternal purpose is centered in Him.

The Lamb Makes All Things New

The title of this concluding section can now be understood in its full scope: the Lamb brings the old creation to its end and introduces the new. The first part requires judgment. Human government reaches its final crisis, the beastly powers are destroyed, Babylon falls, Satan is permanently removed, the dead are judged, Death and Hades disappear, and finally the old heaven and old earth pass away. Nothing belonging to the rebellious old order can frustrate God's purpose forever. The Lamb opens the scroll and carries the divine governmental program through to its completion.

The second part, however, is greater than the first. God does not terminate the old merely to leave emptiness behind. The removal of the old prepares the way for the manifestation of the new. Revelation 21 does not say merely that the first heaven and earth passed away; John immediately sees “a new heaven and a new earth.” He then sees New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. Divine judgment has a positive destination.

This is why the final word of the prophecy is not destruction but consummation. God dwells with humanity. The holy city shines with His glory. The river of water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The tree of life supplies its fruit. The curse is gone, the night is gone, and God's servants see His face and reign forever and ever. Everything toward which the long biblical revelation has been moving has reached its eternal expression.

Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation therefore present far more than a chronology of the end times. They unveil the final stages of God's movement from an old creation damaged by rebellion toward a new creation in which His eternal purpose is consummately expressed. Daniel gives us the framework. Matthew gives us the Lord's own prophetic sequence and decisive distinction between the beginning birth pangs and the Great Tribulation. Revelation opens the seven-sealed scroll and carries us through the final governmental dealings until John stands before the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem.

At the center of everything stands the Lamb. He is worthy to open the scroll because He has overcome. He carries the divine administration through every stage of the transition. He appears victoriously when the rebellious world reaches its final confrontation with God. He reigns, He possesses His bride, He is the lamp of the eternal city, and with God He occupies the throne from which the river of life eternally proceeds. The enormous prophetic movement therefore begins, proceeds, and consummates in relation to Him.

The seven-sealed scroll finally opens upon something far greater than the Tribulation. Through its unfolding we are carried from the final convulsions of the old age toward the complete termination of the old creation itself. Beyond the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, Armageddon, the Millennium, and the great white throne stands the eternal purpose for which God has been working throughout the ages. John sees a new heaven, a new earth, and the holy city descending out of heaven from God. The voice from the throne supplies the fitting conclusion not merely to the judgments of Revelation but to the colossal transition traced throughout this writing: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5).